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A BRILLIANT WOMAN

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BY

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AUTHOR OF

"THE MARCH VIOLET," "SARA," "LOVE IN A GERMAN VILLAGE,"

"A DUTCH COUSIN," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES—III.

London 1892

HUTCHINSON AND CO.

25 PATERNOSTER SQUARE

PRINTED AT NIMEGUEN (HOLLAND)
BY H. C. A. THIEME OF NIMEGUEN (HOLLAND)
AND
TALBOT HOUSE, ARUNDEL STREET,
LONDON, W.C.

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A BRILLIANT WOMAN.

CHAPTER I.

MR. BURLINGTON'S ARRANGEMENTS, AND WHAT THE NEIGHBOURS SAID.

MR. BURLINGTON was at this time sincerely to be pitied. First he discovered that he very much cared for his wife and for her companionship just when she left him. Next he was a typical Englishman, hating the privacy of his home to be looked into, and his most intimate family matters brought under discussion. He would have hated the misfortunes or misconduct of one of his servants becoming the topic of conversation in the neighbourhood, and scandal affecting the gardener's youngest labourer would have sensibly annoyed him.

He passed many sleepless hours, and remained quite as miserable (after tossing about all night) as he did when he lay down to take the rest and sleep supposed very erroneously to belong in so particular a manner to the just.

How was he to escape the gossip this separation would bring upon his devoted head; how arrange matters so that his particular world should not know how things really were? Because when—he never said if—his wife returned to him and to her duty, her path must be made easy to her, and the way left open. Scandal after her return would be more difficult to meet and combat than even now, when, if anything was said, it stood on the uncertain feet of conjecture only; nothing was really known.

There was one thing certain enough, that he must remain away from his place, and content himself with flying visits only, to see for himself how all was enduring the test of his absence. And this was exile, and extremely distasteful to him.

To uproot a county gentleman from his home, his shootings, his country business, his neighbours, and his home farm was to take much of the zest of his life, if not the whole of it, away; and that Mr. Burlington did uproot himself proved in a very strong way how much he cared for his wife's position and the sanctity of his home. Then the second difficulty was a very real difficulty. There was the maid—a good, steady, nice person against whom no fault could be found, and whom his wife liked.

She belonged to the Adleybournes' village. If she was parted with, all manner of things might be said. If she returned to her duties, she would see for herself that her master and mistress were separated, and it would be only natural that a fact of so much importance should be told to her people. Mrs. Burlington had already asked for her once or twice, and the important woman who had taken possession of the sick-room would have to go to other—and, by her own showing, more congenial

—duties elsewhere. Aunt Anne was always ready to console, and always more than anxious to be of any use, but between her conscientious desire to be quite just, her love and compassion for Cyril, and the way in which his wife had been kept in ignorance of what she ought to have known, her offered sympathy was a doubtful comfort to him.

Even with her he could not discuss his wife, and he himself imperfectly understood how he had arrived at his present standpoint, or how criticism had given place to an affection, the strength of which surprised him so much. He had been able to criticise, and he knew now that he almost loved her faults, that he missed her and all the brightness she had brought to his home—that, in short, he loved her—and he could no more analyse her motives or talk over her actions even with Aunt Anne than he could fly.

He went every day to smoke his early cigarette beneath his wife's windows. He seldom heard her

voice, and he was not much edified by the loud-voiced, pompous utterances of Mrs. Bonthorpe, the nurse, whom he looked upon as his natural enemy, seeing that he always hoped that her departure meant his wife's return to him. Mrs. Bonthorpe was a scientifically trained nurse, an outcome of the rage for improvement which puts a scientific training on a substratum of innate vulgarity and imperfect early education. Need it be said that her talk was of duchesses; not one of whom she probably knew by sight, but to whom she left not a shred of character? It was foolish to be annoyed; but poor Mr. Burlington was annoyed when he heard her holding forth about the position of affairs he had done so little to bring into that state. "No establishment! No servants! Nothing! I had to take things in, be housekeeper, and take charge, and do everything! I don't regret it. My last Duchess was a little inclined to have a will of her own, and Mrs. Burlington is a biddable sweet

young person; but, dear me, I had to have my wits about me! I don't grudge the trouble, but I'm sorry for the poor young thing." This was hard on Mr. Burlington, and the whole tone of the woman was offensive to him. He entreated Aunt Anne to find out what his wife's plans and wishes were, and what could be done about the maid, explaining what he felt to be the difficulty.

Aunt Anne saw the difficulty, but it cannot be said that she offered any practicable solution. No words of hers moved Maria; she was quite resolved not to face the neighbourhood—not to see her husband till she could convince everyone that her mother was not a mother to be ashamed of. She was perfectly convinced that she could trace her mother's history and set her in fairer colours to her husband and the world!

She would not look at any other side of the question; and when Aunt Anne said to her, "And supposing, my dear, you never achieve this, are

you and poor Cyril to be apart all your lives; because this is what it comes to?" she went into an agonising pitiful state, and poor Aunt Anne repented at once that she had put such a possibility before her.

"Do not ask me any more," pleaded Maria, with tearless sobs, always so far more painful to hear than an outburst of tears and loud crying. "Believe me, dear Aunt Anne, I grieve more than Cyril can grieve; he has been generous, most kind; he has nothing to look back upon which can cause him remorse or even regret. I have." Then she added in a low voice, "Do you not think that it is terrible for me to have to thank God that my child did not live? Is there any other mother so placed, any mother like me that can say this from her heart? Can I wish to give my children the heritage of shame? Tell this to Cyril. He will understand this."

To this reasoning what had Aunt Anne to oppose?

She might think it exaggerated and feel that in this Cyril's happiness should be consulted, but in her heart she gave Maria right, and Maria saw it.

In the meantime round the fair home of the Burlingtons something, though not all he dreaded, was actually being said. Mrs. Adleybourne did not care for Mrs. Burlington. She had always resented the way in which she monopolized the people who surrounded her. It is hard for a mother with unattractive daughters to see a brilliant young married woman putting them hopelessly in the shade, and, while not a vindictive or an untruthful woman, she acutely felt that her original disapproval of the young wife was justified by after events.

The wildest rumours float best on shallow streams. Nothing was known, but everything was surmised, and from a slight attack of nervousness to actual insanity of an especially aggravated and violent type, everything was believed—strait waistcoat,

padded rooms, and all else. Since the departure of the Burlingtons the archery meeting, which had generally taken place at Burlington Manor in turn with the ducal residence and the Adleybourne's place, had come altogether to be divided between the two last places. Each Thursday saw the county and a few others in their best clothes on the wide lawn of Beau Manoir or at Leybourne.

The proximity of a ducal residence has its advantages and disadvantages, like other things. It enables the neighbours to be familiar with the manners and customs of great people, and to see for themselves that a well-bred duchess is simply like every other well-bred English lady, and it also enables the same country neighbours to see occasionally those whose names are household words, and who influence and control the destinies of the human race in England and abroad. But there is one drawback. The size of a ducal residence is generally so great that it makes all minor resi-

dences few and far between. It is a sort of Triton that swallows up all other smaller things, minnows included, and when, as is sometimes the case, the family have several places, they are too often absent, and the huge park and great house are more ornamental than useful.

It was, therefore, a matter for constant congratulation that the Duke and Duchess lived at Beau Manoir six months out of the twelve, that the Duke took a very real and constant interest in county matters, and that his view of the duties and responsibilities of his position was to draw people round him from the extreme ends of the county, and allow distant neighbours who might not meet otherwise to make acquaintance, and often friendships, under his hospitable roof.

His best shooting was given to sportsmen who had no shooting of their own. He never sold his game, and he never had *battues*. All the game not used in the house was given to his neighbours,

which included the poorest people on his property and surrounding villages. It is easy to imagine that he was beloved. The Duchess, on her side, was one of those charming and delightful persons who have the one great wish to make everyone as happy as she was herself.

She was consistently cheerful, and, though she was not boisterously gay, she was never correspondingly depressed: her definition of happiness was being able to do a kindness to any one, most especially some one beloved. It was a notable fact that her dislike of any ill-natured gossip was so well known, that a story, instead of gaining wings, lost them going up the avenue, and no one ever ventured to repeat before her anything unkind, uncharitable, or unjust, and as everyone wished to please her (as a rule), and most people were a little afraid of risking their welcome, malice was stifled and envy and hatred hid their diminished heads when there was the smallest risk of her

Grace's sharp ears overhearing their remarks. But next in importance to the Duchess (now that the Burlingtons were absent) came Mrs. Adleybourne, and there were a good many people who considered that Mrs. Adleybourne did as much for those she affected as the Duchess herself. She gave excellent tennis parties, and undeniable claret cup, and she brought the right people together. These three very distinct merits obtained a popularity for Mrs. Adleybourne that her ill-nature hardly entitled her to. She was a disappointed embittered woman, and she considered that Providence had treated her with so much unkindness that she had a real grievance against it.

She had been undeniably handsome, and had married a very plain man—an event frequent within everyone's experience. Unfortunately, she had seven daughters and but one son. All the daughters were terribly plain, and were, besides, dull, hopelessly, helplessly, cruelly dull. They had had

masters and governesses, and had travelled. They were good as gold; but in a world that expects to be amused they were a very distinct failure.

Now, certain things are not clearly understood till they are accentuated and brought into strong relief by some sudden contrast; and the Adleybourne girls were spoken of as "dear good girls, not very bright, you know, but awfully good," till the advent of young Mrs. Burlington.

Mrs. Burlington, with her well-cut gowns, her ease of manner, her individual charm, her brightness, and her brilliancy, put the Adleybourne girls at a great disadvantage, and the mother could not help seeing it. She could not, perhaps, help resenting it; and she did resent it.

The imperfectly known story of Mrs. Burlington's journey south came as a drop of balm to her perturbed spirit. She immediately anticipated the worst, and, anticipating it, announced it as an accomplished fact.

"I for one am not surprised, though I am of course grieved," she said, in answer to a remark about the strangeness of the sudden departure from Burlington Manor; "there were always a strangeness and a wildness and a something in Mrs. Burlington's eyes that made me very unhappy. I grieve for him; poor dear fellow."

"Those very brilliant eyes do not always betoken mental vigour," said Mrs. Burton, who had a neutral tone of voice, who generally dealt in aphorisms, and was without special enthusiasm herself in any direction.

"Well, I confess there was always something that made me uncomfortable. Men are so blind that they cannot perceive that that brilliancy they so much admire is not a lasting quality: it always betokens cerebral excitement. If in these high pressure days a girl happens to be modest and quiet and unassuming, she is passed over."

"It is unhappily true; the days of the violets are

over. Then that play—graceful if you like, and the dancing, but—if I had daughters I should not have cared for the *abandon*. There was a want of reserve about it altogether.”

“There was a want of discretion in the whole thing to my mind. I hate your showy people!”

“And,” continued Mrs. Burton, in her most monotonous voice, “why should the Burlingtons be exempted from all the evils of the common lot? What unmingled prosperity has been theirs! Riches, and good health, and good looks—not that I appreciate good looks so much as many people, perhaps. Well, such prosperity must have a check. I am sorry for him, truly sorry. What is her illness, dear Mrs. Adleybourne?”

“Something on the brain, I believe. Her maid lives in our village, and she says so little, and is so very mysterious, that one cannot help fearing the worst. Besides, if it is an ordinary illness, why is the maid not there?”

"Ah, then it is insanity," said Mrs. Burton comfortably, with all the resignation with which we consign our neighbours to endure any sort of ill.

"Well, it is against the rules of Providence that any family should for so many decades have a run of unmingled prosperity," said Mrs. Adleybourne, repeating Mrs. Burton's words unconsciously.

"Is she very violent? Have you heard any particulars? Can you give me any details?" and Mrs. Burton drew nearer and lowered her voice. "Not from curiosity, you know; but because I am so intensely interested. Shall we ever see those poor things among us again?"

"I know really very little. We must hope for the best," said Mrs. Adleybourne in rather a stately way. She was offended because of that "we" slipped in by Mrs. Burton, considering herself several grades above her, her husband having a place—and a fine place—and Mrs. Burton being, so to say, on sufferance only, the wife of a professional

man, with no place to speak of. Mrs. Burton rose and went off to compassionate "those poor Burlingtons" to other people; for it may be remarked that nothing gives a gréater sense of equality than being able to commiserate your social superior. Throughout the assembled party this was the keynote on which and from which every sort of air was played, with major or minor variations. By degrees people got unguarded, and the Duchess caught a few words and moved among her guests, vexed and on the alert.

"You are talking of the Burlingtons," she said, in her soft soprano, to Mrs. Adleybourne. "You will be glad to hear that Mr. Burlington was able to send such a good account of Mrs. Burlington this morning. She is so much better!"

"I am very glad, indeed," said Mrs. Adleybourne after a momentary pause. It is not easy to turn one's mind from one direction to another without a significant stop. These mental feats require a pivot

of some sort. "But do the doctors think the improvement will last?"

Her tone was peculiar, and the Duchess, who had never heard any exaggerations, did not understand exactly what she meant.

"When doctors agree that all danger is over, one is justified in feeling hopeful," she answered. "In these mental cases, so often, relapses are the rule—not the exception."

"One can hardly call Mrs. Burlington's a mental case," answered the Duchess pleasantly. "I think you must have heard an exaggerated account of her illness. May I ask what you have heard?"

"Insanity was spoken of."

"Insanity! How terrible a thing. I am so very glad you have told me. No; Mrs. Burlington has had typhoid fever, which was bad enough. She was delirious, the fever went to the brain—not a very uncommon thing; but she is getting quite well, and is going abroad for change soon."

Mrs. Adleybourne waved her head gently to and fro, as one who should say, "That is an imperfect edition. I know more." The Duchess looked grave; she considered that she had said enough, and that Mrs. Adleybourne should be convinced.

"Mine is good authority," she said rather coldly.

"Very good authority, Duchess. But why is her maid here and not there?"

"A young maid, and probably unaccustomed to illness, is not as good as a professional nurse. However, I hope you will tell the truth to any one who has a wrong version. You know, dear Mrs. Adleybourne, as well as I do, that these rumours are often carelessly started, and do harm. I am sure you will help me to let everyone know the truth."

These words, uttered in her most winning manner, completed Mrs. Adleybourne's conversion.

"You may rely upon me, Duchess," she said, and she meant it.

This was why Mrs. Burton, a little later on, was snubbed by Mrs. Adleybourne for having enlarged a little upon the original suggestion. Much annoyed, Mrs. Burton not very unnaturally turned upon her, as worms are said to turn. "You said so yourself!" she said, with some heat.

"I said so? No! pray, do not think so badly of me, dear Mrs. Burton! To suggest a thing as possible is one thing, to assert it as a fact is another. I merely suggested it. You understand?"

"Yes; I understand," said Mrs. Burton meekly, which, all the same, is exactly what she did not do!

CHAPTER II.

“THAT IS NOT THE LETTER I SENT YOU.”

WHATEVER neighbours in the country might say or do, the solution of the problem regarding his wife's conduct remained unsolved as far as Mr. Burlington was concerned.

Why, now the whole story of her mother's past was known to her, she should persistently refuse to see him, puzzled him beyond conception. For he considered that the whole story was known. He could understand her dislike to facing the country neighbours. She had held her head high, and she would find it difficult at first to accept a lower level

than the one she had placed herself upon. And yet his knowledge of her character led him to expect her to take this whole unfortunate business differently, and to carry everything off with a high hand. If there was humiliation, she was he considered the very last person to allow it, or to betray any mortification. She would be more consistently herself by ignoring either the one or the other, and not allowing any one to credit her with even knowing of any reason for the least change in her demeanour.

But, however wrong his conclusions might be, he had believed that the increasing affection for her he was himself conscious of, was not upon his side only. Those little trifles, which are of no importance in themselves, and yet which become important if studied by the light of after events, showed him an attention to his tastes and his wishes, a desire to please him, which could have but one meaning. After all, he might worry his brain and torment himself to all eternity. There was only one way of

knowing; his wife alone could explain all. His notes were unanswered, his messages unheeded; and he did not know what to think or what course to pursue.

To throw prudence to the winds, march in upon her, and, taking her by surprise, ask her what she meant, what he had done; this naturally was a solution of the difficulty which commended itself to him. But in the face of the doctor's earnest warnings against any undue excitement as fatal to his wife's perfect restoration to health and strength, he put his convictions upon one side, and remained submissively apart.

Several duchesses having (according to her own showing) clamoured for the pompous "Gamp," she departed, and then Cyril learned from Aunt Anne that his wife's one wish was to go to the seaside, and to go, alone if possible, abroad.

Aunt Anne could not bear to tell him of Maria's feverish anxiety to put the sea between him and

herself, and of her plans, which to her, poor lady, sounded so wild and impracticable. She never believed in their assuming any shape, and looked upon everything as simply talk.

But one day a letter was given into her hand, and the letter enclosed one to Cyril from his wife. "I have gone," she said. "I have left England to trace my mother. I do not believe she is dead. I have a clue. If a day comes when I can clear her name, and stand before you on the footing of other wives, I will so stand. I have felt very bitterly the silence that followed my appeal to you. It was written when I was most terribly unhappy, and perhaps looked unreal and exaggerated to you, but I felt every word. The silent scorn with which you treated my letter has nearly killed me. But I am not ungrateful. You have been generous and kind in many things, and you were deceived. We both have much to forgive Mrs. Kingson."

It was signed, "Your true wife."

She had gone. Her room was empty; she had taken the barest necessities with her and very little money; he was afraid. There was no way of tracing her; she had walked out of the house, and in which direction she had gone who could say? Aunt Anne completely lost patience with her.

Mrs. Kingson, when she came to know of her flight, abused her in unmeasured terms.

Mr. Burlington took those few lines to Mr. Kingson, and asked him plainly what she meant. "What letter does she refer to?" he asked. "This is not the first time she has spoken of an unanswered appeal."

Before Mr. Kingson could remind him of the enclosure he had himself forwarded, Mrs. Kingson, who was always in a fever when the subject of the letter was touched upon, uttered a loud scream, startling both men. "Cramp!" she called out; "Cramp! Get me something hot!"

She was a long time recovering, and lay on the sofa, holding the hand of her sympathetic husband,

and was finally persuaded to go to her own room, satisfied that all danger was over for the time.

But Mr. Kingson was a man of tenacious memory. He sympathised very thoroughly with Mr. Burlington's position, and considered that his niece was behaving very badly; and when the episode of the cramp was over, he went back to the library, prepared to allow the husband to talk upon the all-engrossing subject to him, and counsel him to the best of his ability.

"You were asking me when my poor wife had that horrid attack of cramp about my letter to you."

"Not so much about your letter to me, but of what my wife calls her appeal to me. What appeal does she refer to?"

"I fancy, the letter I enclosed to you."

"There was no enclosure."

The two men looked straight in each other's faces.

"I enclosed a letter from her. I put it inside mine before I sealed it."

"Your letter had no enclosure."

"Well, it must have dropped out as you opened it."

"That is impossible, because I opened it at the study table. You remember I was with the Beryls, and came back at once."

"This is very serious," said Mr. Kingson. "Have you got my letter?"

"Yes; I have not destroyed it. If you like I will bring it to you to show you. But there was no enclosure."

Mr. Kingson was called away for a few moments, and Mr. Burlington sat waiting for his return.

As he sat there it seemed to him so strange to see, as he did, his wife's presence vividly before him, and to know that they were so hopelessly apart at present. He could see her once again standing up against the dark oak carving, and all her graceful attitudes as she decked the room with flowers. How the sunrays had touched the ruddy gold of her hair, and how she had dazzled and

charmed him by her pretty ways, and the brilliancy of her colouring, and her smile. And yet how far far less dear she had been to him then than she was now that she seemed to have slipped out of his life.

Where was the cold criticism he had then indulged in? The prosaic future he had planned had vanished; he knew now it could not content him. He knew now that in the ever changing brilliant figure in which he had once found no repose, lay a charm for him without which his life would not be worth much to him, and he was filled with deep regrets for the loss of those peculiarities which are so little understood by many people, who see a definite merit in monotony, and something absolutely wrong in originality. For there are many men who admire, some few who love a girl for possessing characteristics opposite to their own; follow a natural law, and marry them, and then never rest happy till they have done their utmost to level them down to a family standard and destroy the very

essence of what attracted them at first. They do not understand that the happiest married lives are not when people marry who have what is prosaically put as having "much in common," but where the character of the one supplements the deficiencies of the other, and where love and admiration go hand-in-hand.

Mr. Burlington did not notice that Mr. Kingson was some time absent, but when he came back the two walked together through the park and across Kensington Gardens to Mr. Burlington's residence.

When the letter was produced Mr. Kingson changed colour, and spoke with some difficulty.

"This is the only communication you had?"

"The only one. I fancied it was Mrs. Kingson's writing, not yours, till you undeceived me."

"The letter is not mine," said Mr. Kingson.

"That is not the letter I sent you, with poor Maria's enclosed. I never saw that letter before!"

CHAPTER III.

ABOUT TWO LOSSES.

MRS. KINGSON was still lying on her sofa when her husband returned. She had been all this time lulled into a false security. As the days passed on she had told herself that all was right and all would be right, and had dismissed as much as possible the whole idea of discovery from her mind.

But, however blunt a conscience may be, there is an uncomfortable sense of a wrong committed which may or may not be always before one, but which is always there as a black shadow, suggesting a possible check to otherwise fortuitous plans. And

it happened now, as it probably has often happened before, that Mrs. Kingson could not see the strong reasons for her action now which she had seen at the time.

What had possessed her to do such a thing? Why had she burdened her conscience with an action dishonourable and base, such as she recognized this action was?

Trite maxims about repentance did not come to her, and in one sense there was no repentance now. But she hated having a haunting, uncomfortable feeling, and dreaded detection. She had often planned things, and her glib tongue had slipped out many untrue versions of those things to gain her end; but a deed like this she had never done before, and she reflected that if this act was found out she might be suspected of many more. When Mr. Kingson appeared, he luckily or unluckily asked her a question, and she answered it at once—with an appendix.

"Did you write to Mr. Burlington, Maria?" her husband asked. "I mean when all came out."

"Of course I did. You wrote, also; did you not?"

"Then where was the use of your writing?"

"Because I was afraid you might put it too strongly; I wished much to keep things smooth."

"I wish you had left it alone."

"Why? You never would believe me; you never thought me in the right, but one woman knows another woman best. I always warned you that it would be fatal telling Maria. You never will be guided by me. You took your own way. What is the consequence?"

She made rather a strong point here, and she was fully aware of it.

"A very disagreeable thing has happened. My letter, which contained a letter from Maria to her husband, never reached him." He looked eagerly at her. (Mrs. Kingson was conscious of increased

discomfort.) "The loss of that letter is at the bottom of all this miserable business. She would not see him because it was an appeal, and he never answered it. It is terribly unfortunate."

"Very unfortunate." Mrs. Kingson spoke in a low voice which sounded sympathetic to her husband's ear.

"Did Maria think, was she certain, that her husband got her letter?"

"Yes, poor thing! That is the worst part. She asked me over and over again whether I had sent her letter. We have been at wretched cross purposes from end to end. I knew I had sent her letter, and I kept always saying so."

"How unfortunate!" repeated Mrs. Kingson.

"I even asked Burlington whether he had got my letter, and he said yes; that is, he thought it was from you; was it not from you? Not knowing you had written, I said, 'Oh no, it was from me.' Now Maria has gone, how can we tell her?"

Mr. Kingson was so put out and so unhappy that Mrs. Kingson wished more than ever that she had left things alone.

But she had not the courage to confess now; and the mischief was done, and could not be undone. To turn the subject, which was so painful to her, she asked what Maria's plans were, if any one knew them.

"All we know is that she wants to find her mother. The wildest idea. Then she wants to clear her name."

"A still wilder idea," said Mrs. Kingson, severely.

"I do not agree with you," answered her husband, gravely. "I myself think that much in her story supposed to be against her might bear a different interpretation."

"What is she like?" asked Mrs. Kingson, suddenly.

"How can I tell? If she is alive now, she must be much changed. She was the most beautiful

woman I ever saw, and the most graceful. I never fully believed in her going wrong," he added, with much emotion. "Her whole nature must have changed if it was so."

"Her being the most beautiful woman you ever saw is not exactly a description of her personal appearance," said Mrs. Kingson, a little offended with her husband. "Was she like Maria?"

"Yes and no. Not nearly so tall, but with the same sort of eyes, and a flitting colour very like poor Maria's. You remember how her colour came and went in old days. Now she has hardly any colour at all."

"After an illness you cannot expect it," said his wife, who, since she had done Maria an injustice, felt something of dislike towards her, and who at any rate had more than her share of feminine indifference where the loss of beauty in another woman was in question.

She feigned fatigue; she had a great deal to think over and to plan out.

Mr. Kingson went to write to the butler at Burlington. It was important that that letter should be found, and he begged that search should be made, and that inquiries at the post-offices at each end between the manor and the Beryls' place might be made at once also.

Alone, Mrs. Kingson closed her eyes, and tried to see what could be done.

Her first idea, dismissed at once, was to get access in some way to Mr. Burlington's clothes and slip that letter into one of the pockets. She never had been in such a dilemma before. What had possessed her!

Then a sudden thought made her forget her headache and fatigue, and all else. She rose up with a celerity in marked contrast with her previous languor; she locked her door, and going to a writing desk she hunted through the contents with so much excitement that she missed what she wanted to find for a long time.

She rang for her maid. Then she remembered something else she wished to do, sent her maid for some tea, and began to hunt once more among her papers for the famous letter addressed to Mr. Burlington.

But she hunted in vain; she got cold and hot and most wretched. She tried to remember how she had stood and where she had stood when she had changed the letters.

Her memory was a blank about everything except the act she now so bitterly regretted. She tried to remember how she was dressed, and she could not remember even that; and by the time her maid brought her some tea she was sorely in need of it, and she drank it with feverish haste.

Then, saying that she would go for a short walk and try to get rid of her headache, she put on her thickest veil, and left the room.

Her maid, who suffered at times from her capricious temper, watched her going downstairs. She

knew quite well something unusual was in the way, for, if a man can never be "a hero to his valet," it is equally certain that a woman can seldom deceive her maid, who generally knows exactly what reasons there are for peculiar lines of conduct.

For instance, Mrs. Kingson never took her purse with her when she went out walking. It enabled her to say truthfully if asked for charity by a beggar that she had "nothing" with her. To-day she took her purse. This was a significant fact.

Nothing is stranger—if we could only see the process it would be a wonderful sight—than the way in which the threads of our complex lives are being spun by hands we never take into account at all. Mr. Kingson and Mr. Burlington, their wives, and Flora Harrington were all apparently going their several ways, and yet all were working towards one centre, and bringing the various threads together quite unconsciously. But Mrs. Burlington lost courage that day, and came home, giving up

what she wanted to do. Mr. Burlington had set in motion every conceivable way of tracing his wife, and also was following up a slender clue, hoping to find her mother if alive, or to know what her fate had been.

He had done as he imagined everything possible without publicity, and suffered now from that dull sense of inability to do more that succeeds exertion.

Afterwards he accused himself of intense stupidity, of inconceivable negligence, but that was when quite unexpectedly Mr. Wyncote gave the clue he might have given from the very first, had any one thought of applying to him.

It is always easy to speak philosophically of trouble, and to express conviction that if religion does not assist one the study of Hebrew or abstruse mathematical studies are an unfailing remedy for mental anxiety. There are anxieties beyond the reach of either Hebrew or the differential calculus.

Mr. Burlington tried to read, and found it useless.

After years of almost monotonous tranquillity and placid content, he had gone through many varied experiences in eighteen months; and yet he could not wish the old life back now. Always before him was the mocking, laughing, brilliant face, the personality which had touched a dull house with radiance, and had given life a charm and zest it had not before. As he sat pondering and debating what he could do next, there was an arrival, and Mr. Kingson, extremely ruffled, and looking quite unlike himself, walked into the room.

"The most disagreeable thing has happened," he said; "come with me. I have to go to the police at once."

"What is wrong?" asked Mr. Burlington, only too much pleased to have his thoughts forcibly taken off the incessant anxiety of his present position, and rapidly getting into his coat.

"My wife's maid—poor soul! she is in a dreadful distress about it!—was bringing my wife's travelling-

bag from King's Cross to Victoria by underground, and one or two boxes. My wife drove home and left her to do this. Looking out of the window at some station, she saw one of the boxes put out, evidently by mistake, and she unwisely jumped out to tell the guard to put it back. Before she could regain the carriage the train was off, and in the carriage remained the travelling-bag!"

"I hope there was not much in it."

"A great deal too much! Two or three bank-notes for £5 or £10, some of her diamonds, a cheque-book, and other things of value. It is dreadfully provoking."

The two men went off to Scotland Yard; bills were printed; a reward offered; and everything possible was done at once.

During the next few days the number of people interviewed, the consultations with the police, and the discussion about this loss occupied a good deal of attention.

In the middle of all this excitement Mr. Burlington received a letter from home, forwarded by Marsham.

It had been sent to the Beryls' place, and stated that a letter for him had been found, and would be delivered up on payment of a small reward "to cover expenses."

Little dreaming of the importance of this letter, Mr. Burlington laughed about it with Mr. Kingson, saying how strange it was that they should both be mixed up with missing property at the same time, and he proposed to go to the place named to claim his letter early next morning. Mrs. Kingson was not alarmed. She did not at the moment connect it with her own dealings. It had occurred to her suddenly that the missing letter might have been in the pocket of a dress she had disliked and had given to her maid, and that her maid might have sold it, and she had started with the idea of going to the woman who bought these things to

find out. But she had never seen her, and she was afraid of rousing any suspicions in the woman's mind.

She contented herself by saying diplomatically to the maid in question, "Have you had any successful dealings with Madame Marie lately?"

"No, ma'am."

"Oh, I am rather glad, as I was afraid I had left a memorandum in the pocket of one of the dresses I gave you."

"There was nothing that I saw, ma'am, or I should have brought it to you."

She did not add "I got a better bargain from an old Jew," but she did say "I sold the things to a respectable person in the city."

Then Mrs. Kingson knew that the letter, that letter, was the one in question.

Just as she was turning over in her own mind how to get there also, her husband came to tell her he had just heard from the same place, and that her bag and jewels were found.

Mrs. Kingson's excitement was great. She had a faint hope that in the larger matter and the interest it would create in her husband's mind the letters would sink into insignificance. But the hope was very faint, and she was wretched!

CHAPTER IV.

DISCOVERIES.

IT is impossible to describe Mrs. Kingson's state of mind. She saw before her the whole of her after relations with her husband endangered, and she was completely hopeless. Discovery stared her in the face. Usually, she was a person who saw many ways out of a difficulty, but she saw no way now. She thought till her brain grew weary; and everything came round to the same conclusion; all was over, and her sin had found her out.

Her misery was so great that she was passive now. She sat in a hansom beside Mr. Burlington

stupefied and silent, and he was grateful to her; for in the silent hours when the brains grows clearer there had rushed upon him quickly a hope that the letter he was going to retrieve might be the missing one from his wife. He could understand nothing of it all, but he hoped in the vague way in which we do hope against hope, that a solution of his difficulties was beginning to be found.

As they drove along, each thing they passed was noted by both, as trifles impress themselves upon the brain at solemn and peculiarly trying moments to our own infinite amazement afterwards. The great things in life are often remembered with a certain indistinctness, but little things—the position of a window-curtain, the arrangement of bits of china, a coarsely coloured print in a shop window—these small insignificant things remain with us, and stand out clearly, when all else is forgotten.

Past many dingy streets, redolent of stale tobacco smoke, and the vegetable refuse left after the morning

stalls had been cleared away, and then the cab stopped. Down a narrow alley, gathering her skirts closely around her, Mrs. Kingson followed Mr. Burlington, and was in her turn followed by Mr. Archer, the detective, a very important man, but shrewd and experienced.

Skirts of old dresses, old coats, cloaks, and clocks struggled for place on overcrowded pegs and shelves. The counter of the little dingy shop they were in search of was loaded with oddments, from gridirons and flat irons to mended china, this last alone keeping a look of better days. A very dirty man, whose sole remaining eye seemed perpetually searching for the one that had gone; a still dirtier woman with the hopeless, tired look gin bestows as much as opium upon its victims, stood expectant, hiding their fears behind a sort of dogged, obstinate look.

"Your pleasure?" said the man, surlily.

"I received this letter yesterday," said Mr. Bur-

lington, holding up the letter in his hand. "I have come to answer it in person."

"Are you alone?"

"No. You can see I have others with me."

"What will you give me for the letter?"

"I cannot say till I have seen it."

"And the jewels! Let me see them, let me see my bag!" broke in Mrs. Kingson.

Here Archer stepped forward. "It is right and better you should know I am a detective from Scotland Yard. I know you both. I think you know me. Produce the jewels, the letter, and everything else at once, and account for having them in your possession." The woman brazened out everything; the man turned white with fear. Sullenly he produced the bag, and emptied the contents upon the counter. Everything was there, but no letter.

"All is here but the letter" said Mr. Archer, after having heard from Mrs. Kingson that every-

thing was intact. "Produce the letter at once."

"The letter was not in the bag," mumbled the old man. "It was in the pocket of the maid's gown."

Dirty from its strange vicissitudes, and much crumpled, it was given reluctantly to Archer, who looked at it and handed it to Mr. Burlington. It was Mr. Kingson's missing letter. Mr. Burlington put his purse into Archer's hands and retreated to the doorway, where by the uncertain flare and flicker of the gas-jet he read in anxious haste his wife's appeal. Then he understood something of what she must have felt at its having been left unanswered. And a burning indignation against those who had worked this wrong filled him. He stood passive, waiting till his business was over, till he could get away, with the feeling that in purer air, perhaps, he could understand better.

In a lady's maid's gown! How did it get there? The seal was intact. Had it been sent irregularly to the post, and forgotten?

Placing it inside his coat, he turned once more towards the counter, where Mrs. Kingson and Archer were finally arranging everything. It struck him that Mrs. Kingson looked very white, but until now not the faintest suspicion had come to him that she was connected with the disappearance of that letter.

Until now. But at that moment Archer was insisting upon proof, insisting that the lady's maid's gown was to be produced. The woman retreated to the back room, and, after some delay, she re-appeared, holding in her arms a silk gown degraded from its high estate, a gown he had seen Mrs. Kingson wear often.

Even then he did not suspect her, but she had by this time lost her nerve, and everything else; the close atmosphere of the little place, the closer smell of gas and of old clothes, made her really faint; and, catching hold of his arm, she made her way into the air, and hurried along the narrow street, and to the cab, where she crept into a cor-

ner, and, covering her face with her hands, she said in a voice broken by sobs, as soon as they had started, "Do not condemn me unheard!"

"Condemn you, Mrs. Kingson?"

"That letter. I kept it back!"

"What was your motive?"

"I wanted to put things before you differently. My husband speaks so bluntly. I was afraid" He could hardly credit his ears! Was it possible that she had done so great a wrong, and from so small a motive?

She sobbed unrestrainedly for some time. Then she said, "Was it so important? Have I done very great harm?"

"You have nearly ruined two lives," he said, "you have made me miserable, and you have driven my poor wife from home."

"I never thought"—she began.

Something in his face stopped her, and she sank back frightened and ashamed. She had but one

thought now; she must throw herself upon his mercy; her husband must never know.

“Mr. Burlington, I have done very, very wrong, but my motive was good.”

He turned round in surprise. Was she going to apologize? Did she expect him to forget all the cruel wrong she had done? What was she going to say?

With real and unfeigned misery she clasped her hands together, and her tears nearly choked her. “If my husband comes to know all will be over between us.”

Then he knew what she wanted him to do—to keep silence.

If he spoke and told how she had acted what good would it do? Yet he had to struggle against the wish to bring home to her something of the sorrows she had brought upon his wife and himself. But he was a man capable of generosity. The struggle lasted but a short time.

Turning so that he could see her face, he said, shortly, "My advice to you, Mrs. Kingson, is to confess to your husband—to tell him everything. A secret is an ugly thing between husband and wife. As regards myself, I will never tell him.

"Hush!" he exclaimed, as incoherent and passionate expressions of gratitude broke from her. "I must, on my side, make conditions. I want to know what arguments you used to induce my wife to marry me; I want to know how much truth lay in the statements you made me; I want to know everything. I want the whole truth, and nothing else. You owe me something. I claim this from you as my right."

"It is your right," said the subdued woman; "ask me anything. I promise to tell you the exact truth!"

"Quite plainly, and with no embellishments?"

She repeated his words. Her misery had been so deep that her relief was proportionately great.

"You told me, Mrs. Kingson, that my wife had

fallen in love with me, that she loved me with a passion generally inspired by younger men. I believed you against my own conviction, against my better judgment. I found out that I had been deceived. My wife, thank God for it, is truthful she owned the truth to me. That lie—I must speak plainly!—made me propose to her. What arguments did you use with her?”

“I said you loved her; but . . . that you would never propose to her (we all thought you were not a marrying man!). Then Maria wanted to prove that I was wrong, and that everybody was wrong . . .”

“I see you played upon her weakness, and upon mine. But what made you so anxious to marry her? She is unusually brilliant, and very lovely, and was much admired.”

“Her story,” she whispered, in a very low voice, “and——”

“The whole truth without embellishment,” he repeated.

"Oh, it is hard to drag all my motives to light, but there are my girls. They were growing up; they will soon be out."

"I understand now," he said; "she had to be got out of the way."

He spoke no more; he dropped her at her own door, and went home. He denied himself to every one except Aunt Anne, and he simply told her that the letter poor Maria had talked of had been forwarded from the Beryls to Burlington, and on to him, and that he could not wonder at her indignation in receiving no reply.

"In every line she shows that I have won her heart," he said, with a depth of feeling she knew betrayed his fervent conviction. "I do not believe that with so much happiness before us this separation will last long."

Mr. Kingson was so much occupied with the recovery of his wife's jewels, and her account of the den of thieves, that the letter passed completely

out of his thoughts, and he did not ask a single question about it, which was a great relief to Mrs. Kingson. All the same, she had forfeited Mr. Burlington's respect, and she was very miserably aware of it.

CHAPTER V.

MRS. BURLINGTON EN ROUTE.

NOTHING was further from Maria's intentions than to do anything that might vex, worry, or annoy her husband; only it never occurred to her to consult him. Weakened by illness, and terribly hurt by the discoveries she had made, she was literally unable to see his side of the question at present. She imagined that he did not really love her; how could he? She had been placed in so horribly humiliating a position that she could not face him, or anyone who knew her story. She must go away and give him, at any rate, freedom from her presence.

She made no definite plans. Though she spoke of tracing her mother—and intended to do it—she had all the hopelessness about this at times that she had about other things. But, though her mother might not be alive, she had a conviction that if all her story was told it would be proved that she had not been the faithless wife she was supposed to have been, and if she could make this clear, and that her husband would recognize the fact, her own position would be different; she would in that case not be ashamed to look anyone in the face.

The crossing once over, she began to realize the distance between herself and all she cared for. Then she recognized what she had done, and her heart sank, and at that moment she would gladly and thankfully have returned—not to her husband, perhaps, but to England at once.

She had taken a courier-maid with her and her intention was to go to Angers, to the convent where her mother had been educated, and to trace anything

she could of her mother's family from that place. She barely remembered her mother. Her recollection was of a sweet, bright face, often covered with tears, it is true, but at times laughing, and always playing with her. And she got confused, never feeling sure whether her recollection was of her mother or her nurse.

In Paris how full her heart was! How it all reminded her of her mortification when she discovered her husband's attainments. She thought so tenderly of him now; his unfailing patience and goodness where so many men would have been the reverse. In later days, since her illness at Burlington, he had shown her more affection; they had appeared to be beginning to understand each other better. Flora's faults enhanced her husband's merits.

The six hours it took to get them to Angers were weary ones to her. She weighed over and over again in her mind how she could let her husband and Aunt Anne know she was well without

betraying her whereabouts. She must try to remove the stigma from her mother which shadowed her love. She had always the intense dread of a possibility if she returned. She looked forward with horror to the chance of children who would have to be ashamed of her birth and her parentage. This thought spurred her on, and clinched her determination when it threatened to falter.

In the pleasant town of Angers, in sight of the blue line on the horizon of the hills of La Vendée, Mrs. Burlington established herself. She chose a quiet hotel at the top of the hill. There were homeliness and a look of comfort about it, and it stood back from the road with a poplar tree in front that had been allowed to grow up as nature intended it to do, in striking contrast with the lopped and pruned trees everywhere else in that garden of France. It was with a thrill that she saw the convent in the distance, and reflected on all she hoped to establish during her visit there.

The table d'hôte was rather a trial to her. For the first time in all her life she had to face it alone, and she was relieved to find how few it consisted of—some eight or nine people, all a little curious, but apparently too hungry to exhibit their curiosity or satisfy it.

How strange it was to see them bending over their food and eating as if they had hardly a moment to spare. All at once she started, for a nasal voice asked her a question. At first she hardly realized that she was the person addressed, but when she heard her own name she no longer could doubt.

“I say, Mrs. Burlington, are you a stranger here; do you come for pleasure or business?”

Looking up, she saw a tall, rather angular lady staring intently at her from the opposite side of the table. She was evidently an American.

“Do we not all travel for pleasure?” Mrs. Burlington said, coldly.

“Now, that’s a kind of put me off. Well, if you

don't wish to tell, never mind. But if it's for pleasure I guess this hotel is not the one I would choose."

"Is there anything wrong with it?"

"Wall, there's no coats, and without coats, to my mind, there's no society, and certainly no pleasure. I'm frank, you see!"

"Yes; I see."

"I'm Lavinia Jemima Stocks, from New York city. I'm not ashamed of my name, my country, or my profession."

She looked a little defiantly at Mrs. Burlington, and went on after a moment's pause, "My father's a dry goods store, and I keep the books when I'm at home, and I do something else."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Burlington.

"Wall, what's your profession?"

"I have no profession."

"No! Do you do nothing?"

"You are right, I am afraid; I do nothing."

"But you're married; where's your husband?"

"At home," Mrs. Burlington answered, and little understood Miss Lavinia Stocks if she imagined that in returning these very short answers in a dignified manner she was likely to be freed from her persistent questions.

"If your husband's at home he does something. What does he do; has he a store?"

"Good gracious, no," said Mrs. Burlington, unguardedly.

"There's no need to have a scare about a store. It's a very paying thing. Well, then... I know what he does. He draws teeth!"

This was too much for Mrs. Burlington, she burst out laughing.

"Wall—you needn't laugh. If your teeth are your own they're good ones. Are you ashamed of what he does? I very nearly married a dentist myself, but—he concluded when he got older he wouldn't take the blame of me."

"My husband has property. He looks after those

things country gentlemen do look after in England."

"I see; one of those everlasting swells that make a general muss of everything, and call it county business."

Mrs. Burlington was too angry to answer her.

"Wall, there's no cause to look high. We Amuricans know that everything is pretty much in a muss in England. If you want to have good work done you must pay for it; that's my maxim. Wall—I suppose you've had a quarrel with him, and you're taking the air abroad till your temper's in harness again?" This was too much.

Mrs. Burlington, who required nothing more, rose with a slight bow generally to those present and went out of the room, followed by a loud laugh from Miss Lavinia Stocks; and as she left she heard her say, "She's mighty high, but I hit the right knob on the head that time."

In her own room she shed tears of mortification. Was this what she had laid herself open to? Sepa-

ration! She had never called her step by that name! And quarrel . . . How could she quarrel with Cyril, who had borne and forborne so patiently? The elasticity of her nature, however, dispersed the remembrance of her annoyance, and when her maid brought her some coffee she was ready to go to the bank of the river and enjoy the soft evening air, in which was no moisture, for in that part of France no dew ever comes down to give chills on one hand and refresh the ground on another.

Taking counsel with her maid, she decided that they should leave this hotel and go to one they had passed, where they would have better accommodation; and, pleased that Miss Lavinia Stocks would have no further opportunity for showing her desire for knowledge at her expense, Mrs. Burlington enjoyed her walk, and went back to sleep as she had not slept since she left home.

Next morning very early everyone was astir. Maria got up, and looked out of her window.

There was a leisurely kind of bustle going on in the courtyard below—some big brown horses, with one trace unharnessed, were feeding under the great tree, shaking the collars and the bells upon them as if they liked the music they made; girls with bundles on their heads; women hurrying to early mass, their white-winged caps sticking out as they passed swiftly by; on the river some heavily-laden barges, guided by long pole-like rudders from the centre of the boat; a troop of cavalry returning from exercise trotted briskly up the paved street. There were light and colour and movement under a brilliant sunshine; and Mrs. Burlington, while appreciating it all, had that forlorn feeling consequent on her own self-willed action of being somehow outside the happiness possessed by every one else.

When she was dressed, she gave notice of her departure downstairs, and was rather annoyed by the woman's satirical expression. Then, summoning a *voiture de place*, she asked to be driven to the

convent, leaving her maid to pack and make ready to leave. On second thoughts, however, she left her the money to pay everything up, and asked her to meet her at the hotel, and she went there on her way to secure rooms. She found very much larger and better rooms, and took them at once. Then she drove on to the convent.

There was a long delay when she asked for the Mother Superior. Her heart beat quickly as she thought that it was possible she might find her mother here, that in a short time she might feel her arms around her; and each distant step sent the blood more quickly coursing through her veins, and she found it difficult to preserve her composure.

Failure had never occurred to her. She had never asked herself how she would act, supposing the worst was true—supposing her mother had lived and died in sin. Now this possibility came before her in all its most terrible aspect, and she was frightened.

Would she have to go back to Cyril, and humble herself, and tell him that her quest had only brought a deeper anguish, and a greater humiliation to her?

She seemed to suffer more during the time she sat waiting there than she had yet done. She told herself that she had put herself into a position she could not hold; she had said "till she could clear her mother's name" . . . and if she could not clear it . . . Had she lost him? She felt suffocated in that small room. Her head got giddy, and she rose to try to open the window, as she did so the door was pushed open, and the tall dignified figure, the benevolent face, of the Mother Superior was before her.

"My child, you are ill," she said in an accent of profound commiseration. She pushed open the window and got a little bottle of essence from a cupboard in the passage. Maria choked back her tears, and struggled for composure while the mother spoke to her.

"You are young, and you are in great trouble; you must not try to speak just yet. When you are better we can talk together. Trouble and trial always look unbearable when we are young," she said. "Are you English? Would you prefer imperfect English, or shall we speak French together?"

"I can speak French," said Maria, by degrees calming under the influence of the tender, calm, emotionless tone, in which, however, was sympathy. "My trouble is perhaps of my own making, and yet not altogether. Do you remember a lady educated here who married unhappily and came back here? She was half French, half Irish—Marie Rorke."

"I remember her well. She did some very foolish things. She repented, and came here for a time. Are you her daughter? You are in some things like her."

"I am her daughter. You say she did foolish things. She has been accused of doing wicked

things; and I, her child, want to clear her name."

"For her sake—or for your own?"

Maria's absolute truthfulness impelled her to answer, "For my own. I do not remember her; and she left me!" she added, with a simplicity which was pathetic.

"In the first place, as the most important part of your wish should come first, I may say, truthfully, that from my knowledge of your mother I am quite satisfied that she did nothing wicked at any time."

"Oh, thank God?" said Maria, in an outcry of joy.

"But she did some very foolish things, and I do not think it wonderful that she was supposed to be guilty of worse than she ever dreamed of. She was, unfortunately, a very undisciplined character. Yes, I must say it, totally undisciplined," added the Superior, severely.

"Will you tell me my mother's history? Does she live? Oh, where is she!"

"I am not certain; but I think she lives. I do not know where she is; but she is not in France."

"Not in France?"

"No. She was by her own wish brought here, very ill; we nursed her. When she recovered she got restless. To have the sea between her child and herself was more than she could bear. She went over to England to be near you. She has always been near you; she has seen you constantly. She told us of your marriage and of her thankfulness that your life would be a safe and happy one. Since that time we have not heard once from her."

"Then why do you think she lives?" asked Maria, who nearly broke down again, as the thought of her mother watching over her, never making herself known, always near her without obtruding herself, was an overpowering thought to her.

"Your mother never broke a promise, and she made us a promise. She has a small income. Of

her own accord she promised that when she died that income should pass to us to maintain certain charities she was interested in. As we have never received that money, I think she must be alive. This promise was made when your marriage placed you beyond reach of any sort of need," said the old nun, always speaking in the far off tone of one to whom all mundane matters are immaterial.

"Have you time? Can you tell me my mother's story now?" implored Mrs. Burlington.

"I have not time to-day. I am sorry, since you wish it. But come back to-morrow morning, and I think I can give you one or two of her letters. Take comfort, and all will be well."

She rose, and the interview was at an end. Mrs. Burlington was driven to the hotel in a dream of felicity. What she would have given to have had Cyril there—to have been able to lay her head on his shoulder and claim his sympathy.

She sat down and wrote to him, and her happi-

ness overflowed in every line. So did her affection. She told him to tell Aunt Anne, who, believing the worst about her mother, had yet always been so good and so kind to her. Like most letters written under a strong impulse of gratitude, or under the influence of any great emotion, the letter was touching, it was so completely without disguise, or without any attempt to exaggerate or to tell a story in a favourable light.

"I begin to feel how stupidly I have acted," she said, "and how wrongly; but you will forgive, as you have always forgiven, and all the rest of my life I will make amends."

It was unfortunate that, when that letter reached his home, Cyril Burlington was not there to receive it.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TABLE D'HÔTE.

MRS. BURLINGTON found her maid rather ruffled when she reached the hotel. The landlady had asked impertinent questions, and had not shown herself very obliging, and these complaints were new to the young and somewhat spoiled wife. "It does not much matter," she said. "We shall, I hope and believe, leave to-morrow afternoon for Paris and home. And this afternoon, if you will order a carriage, we can have a good long drive somewhere. I want air. I have such a headache. The room at the convent was so close at first."

Pacified by the promise of a drive and the prospective early move, the maid exerted herself to make things comfortable.

Mrs. Burlington had really too bad a headache to go downstairs, and had some soup sent up for her luncheon.

As she passed through the hall to the carriage she saw a great many men in uniform standing about, and remarked it to her maid. "I suppose it is some fête day we know nothing about," she said. The maid said nothing in reply but looked curiously at her mistress. It was not very pleasant driving as the roads were most fearfully dusty, and there was no shade. All the woods that appeared so very promising in the distance were the dense foliage of trees lopped off to within four or five feet of the ground. At long intervals came some of the large high-roofed chateaux always so immensely out of proportion to the size of the properties, and having no well-kept grounds about them. For the proprietors

go to reside on their properties generally in order to economize after the amusements of Paris and the various bathing places, and try to save a little for the coming season over again. The smartest lady who in Paris has her liveries and all else in great perfection, is served by a man-of-all-work in the country, in a linen jacket or a blouse, and very seldom goes beyond the grounds. The forlorn look of untidiness depressed Mrs. Burlington, and she was soon tired of her slow progress. She went home and read till dinner was ready.

When she went downstairs she found herself at a small table with one vacant place opposite to her; and, a good deal to her dismay, she found a long table being rapidly filled by officers in uniform. They used it as their messroom, and the hotel was their headquarters. Maria was afraid that she was going to be the only lady in the room. Already she saw many inquisitive, if admiring, glances in her direction, and, though outwardly looking quite

cool and collected, she did not like the situation. She trusted her opposite neighbour would be a woman. There was a strident voice and a well-known bang at the door, and Miss Lavinia Jemima Stocks marched in; raised an *incroyable*, and very coolly surveyed the officers; gave them a sort of compromise between a nod and a bow, and sat down in the vacant place opposite Mrs. Burlington.

Had anyone told that lady the evening before that she would welcome the American she would have laughed the idea to scorn; but she did welcome her. She felt that even Miss Lavinia Jemima Stocks was better than nothing in the shape of a woman to make her feel a little less solitary.

She soon, however, began to think it a doubtful comfort. Miss Stocks spoke loud and had a fixed idea that "no furriner understood English."

"Wall," she began, "we have better food here than we had down there; that's a fact; and coats. But you are sly. You pretended coats were no-

thing to you, and here you are." She laughed with exquisite enjoyment. "You are sly," she repeated. "Here are the coats and here are you. Now, I don't pretend that coats are indifferent to me any more than clothes. I love clothes. How those men stare. Never mind, do as I do, and look at 'em back again; and, to Maria's horror she raised her *incroyables*, and deliberately surveyed the officers again.

"*C'est une originale*" said one voice, but Mrs. Burlington's reserved manner and well-bred air kept them in check. They grew a little noisy, and Maria suggested leaving the room as soon as the dessert was attacked.

"I'm not going to flinch because of mankind's presence," said Miss Stocks, "and if you had not wished to have coats in sight why did you come here?"

"I changed because I found my room very uncomfortable, and also I hoped to have more quiet here."

Miss Stocks raised her *incroyables*, but this time it was to take a prolonged survey of Mrs. Burlington's face.

"Wall—do you happen to know any of those remarkable creatures called horse-marines?" she said slowly, "because, if you do, you had better tell that to them," and she laughed loudly. Mrs. Burlington was so irritated by her laugh and all else that she rose, and hurried out of the room.

Oh, that Cyril was there! She felt the eyes of everyone upon her, and she saw that she had put herself in a doubtful position. Tears of mortification filled her eyes. What a difference when she was shielded by her husband's presence and when she was alone!

She did not leave her room again that night, and she tried to read and not to dwell too much on a temporary annoyance, or on the promised history of her mother's youth. But the noise downstairs continued till the hours were very late.

There were billiards, and then much laughter, people went to and fro, and there was a perpetual rushing up and downstairs. Then Miss Lavinia Stocks actually came to her door, and would take no message and no answer from her maid; she must see Mrs. Burlington herself if only for a moment. "Wall," she said, "you are mean to leave the table that way! I felt quite scared, and one of those nice gentlemanlike officers came to ask me whether you had gone away because they made too much noise. I said no. Then he asked me who you were, and I answered didn't know; that you said you had a husband, so perhaps you had. . . ."

"Good night, Miss Stocks," said Maria in such vehement wrath that even that obtuse person drew back, and, as the door was promptly shut, she was left soliloquising in the passage, and her indignation found vent in the following words:

"Wall, for a fire-eating young woman, I will say

"I never saw your match!" and, very much discomfited, she turned off to her own room also.

Long before the Mother Superior was quite ready to receive her, Mrs. Burlington was at the convent. She had hardly slept. Feverish and anxious, she had risen early, and driven off, leaving her maid a little bewildered by the incessant restlessness of her mistress.

It was, so far, unfortunate for the American lady that, however amenable the maid might have been to tell or disclose anything, she had nothing to tell when she was questioned closely. Mrs. Burlington had engaged her for a trip abroad; she understood she was ordered by the doctor to take a short trip for her health.

"And what is Mr. Burlington like?"

"I never saw him."

"Never saw him! Wall, that is a remarkable fact—a very remarkable fact."

Mrs. Rutter was not at all adverse to a little

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conversation; she found Mrs. Burlington much too reticent. She had been accustomed to ladies who knew no language but their own. Now, Mrs. Burlington knew French better than she did herself, though something might have been added with advantage to the purity of her accent; and Mrs. Rutter found it dull to be running about with a lady who never spoke to her at all, except to express annoyance about something she wished carried out. Again, in her capacity of courier-maid she had always been accustomed to plan the journeys and choose the hotels. This was quite taken out of her hands by her present mistress. "I see what you think, miss," she said. "You think that if there was a Mr. Burlington I should have seen him. But, though I never saw him, I found out all about him in the neighbourhood, and Mr. Burlington does exist. There is no doubt about that."

"Wall—if he's a fact, he is a fact," said Miss Lavinia. "There's money?"

"Oh, there's money, but not very freely spent, and accounts most pertickler done up every night in a book. It's always, 'What's the price, and how much will it be?' I don't hold with rich people who think twice about every penny they spend."

"I despise them," said Miss Lavinia, with a sniff. "I do hate your English swells that walk five times round a farthing before they give it away."

"The servants don't understand about all the leaving home and everything. Then, to be quite fair, I must say they said Mrs. Burlington had had fever—typhoid."

"Goodness gracious! Is it infectious?" exclaimed Miss Lavinia.

"Not as far on as this," said Mrs. Rutter, with a rather contemptuous smile.

"Now, what on earth is she doing at that convent?" exclaimed Miss Lavinia.

"Mrs. Burlington is that reserved that I could not say; but I always feel, when people are so very

careful, they have their reasons," said Mrs. Rutter.

"Ah, wall——" said Miss Lavinia. "Mr. Burlington's a fact. That's something. I wonder, as his wife's been ill, why he did not come to look after her. It would seem more natural, eh?"

Mrs. Rutter's lips were tightly compressed as one who says, "I know a good deal more than I choose to say." And Miss Lavinia understood the expression.

"Has your lady got as good a room as I have?" she asked, throwing open her door and bidding Mrs. Rutter enter.

"It's larger," said Mrs. Rutter, "and it looks different. My lady has such a lot of silver things in her bag. It's a deal of worry carrying all that silver about. I'm sure that bag is as heavy as lead; and when ladies take no footman it's too much. I'm one for consistency," said Mrs. Rutter, who had begun to dislike her mistress very much, and still more since she had emphasised her grievances by talking about them.

Her exposition had quite a different effect from the one she expected. Miss Lavinia was much impressed by this account of the silver, which was, as she would have put it, a "fact"—she might perhaps have added, a "solid" fact.

Ignorant of having given any offence, Mrs. Burlington was sitting waiting for the sweet-faced old nun who had already given her so much comfort. When she entered she came with her hands full of papers neatly tied up together, and she placed these at once in her visitor's hands.

"Read these by-and-by," she said; "my avocation does not permit me to be very long with you. Those letters give you the history of your mother's life after her marriage. I can tell you of her only before she left us.

"Her father was an Irishman, a man of good family, and he married a French girl—a pretty, graceful creature. They had very little money, and neither of them knew how to make good use of

that little. They were often in great straits . . .

“It is wonderful how people exist—how they manage to get on. Even with the little daughter, the two somehow struggled on!

“As she got older she came here every day. In her shabby little frock, without any sort of assistance from her dress, she was more lovely, more graceful than I can describe. Ah! my child, even now I grieve to think of all that tender soul had to endure! Her mother fell ill. She saw this adored mother in want of everything! Against our prayers and entreaties she took a step we all deeply, bitterly regretted! A Spanish musician, who gave lessons in the neighbourhood, was immensely struck by your mother’s lovely and graceful figure, and he taught her to dance.

“She danced with a fire and a grace which were something wonderful. She used to dance to the scholars here, and practise her steps every spare minute. It was like the dancing of a fairy, and

her little feet moved with a swiftness truly marvellous. She left home and got an engagement in Paris. She had an old servant with her, and no one ever had a single word of reproach to utter against her character. She went to London; the sums of money she sent her poor mother. She wrote constantly. It was for them she danced, for them she worked. She called herself 'Donella.' She always talked of the time when she could come home with a little income. . .

"There was a fire in the village where her parents lived. They were not burned, but the shock and the fright killed poor Mrs. Rorke, and her husband did not long survive her." Here the good Mother stopped. The recollection was very painful to her; she might have told how some of the sufferers had been carried to the convent and tended and cared for till death mercifully released them from their sufferings; but her moments were all too short, and her busy cares claimed her as

soon as she had kept her promise to the child of the girl she had loved.

"I must now blame your mother" she continued. "I fully expected, once the necessity for exertion was over, that she would have returned here, where I offered her shelter and protection. But the excitement, the applause, the admiration she met with turned her from us; she remained on the stage, though still keeping her name pure and her fame unspotted. . . . Then she married. This fact and your birth were all we knew for a long time.

"Some years afterwards, with the fire of her eyes extinguished, and her figure bowed from a severe accident, she came to see us. It was terribly unfortunate that I was ill, and only saw her once. She told her story to one who had not known her in her bright youth, and who did not believe her. . . . Your poor little mother had a quick, hasty temper, and had also a most sensitive nature. . . . She

would not remain ; before I could interfere, before I knew anything about her going, she had gone! I have never heard of her—I have never seen her since."

Mrs. Burlington had listened as only those listen whose whole future hangs upon the verdict to be given then.

How could she clear her mother's name without proof! How could she trace her career! All seemed as far back, as cruelly vague as ever! She was most bitterly disappointed.

"Will you tell me, my child (as your face betrays your disappointment), does much depend upon your tracing your mother's career? Why are you so anxious to do so now? You are married, and it seems to me that it might have been necessary before. I do not understand the necessity now. Will you explain it?"

"I married without knowing who my mother was. The happiness of my life now depends upon my clearing her name."

“ Ah! then your husband did not know, and he visits it on you! Poor, poor child, it is sad, it is terrible for you. Does he show no mercy?”

“ Oh, do not think this of him! He is goodness itself. He knew before. . . He thought it for my happiness not to know. But how can I live now that I do know? How could I bear that any children” . . . She stopped with a deep, agonising sob.

The Mother looked compassionately upon her. “ A proud heart and a high spirit,” she said gently. “ Your mother erred. She left her husband. There even I cannot blame her, knowing what I know; but to prevent your father’s following her, to prevent his claiming her, she allowed him to suppose that she left home with the man who loved her. . . She declared that it was the appearance of evil only, and that he had taken her to a place of safety, and there bid her farewell. She called him her knight without reproach. I believe her; but,

frankly, others did not, and I am afraid others will not! Judge for yourself."

Maria was trying to control her sobs. She was completely broken down by all this terrible revelation, this annihilation of her hopes. She had no proofs. The Mother rose. "In those records you will see what a good and pure woman your mother was. But her fatal error may leave consequences she never thought of; it is one penalty of deviating from the right path. If you learn something of her afterlife, will you let me know? And may I advise you, and say one word of counsel, as you are her child?"

"Say anything! Advise me! Help me!"

"If your husband accepts the facts—if even he, as a man of the world, puts the worst construction upon your mother's actions, and yet loves you—accept his kindness, and thank God for it. Humble yourself, and take this baffled hope as your cross, and take it cheerfully. Wifely obedience is your first duty now!"

She laid her hand on Mrs. Burlington's bowed head, and, with a gesture of farewell, was going away, when her visitor said, "I will . . . try I will take your advice. I will leave my address. If you hear anything, you will let me know."

So they parted. Something in the holy calm of the Mother Superior's face gave a sense of having been in contact with one above the world, above its pettiness, its small aims, and its petty jealousies ; and yet she had sympathised with the feelings of a daughter for her mother. Mrs. Burlington had had a disappointment ; but she felt, as she drove away, something of the elevation of the Mother Superior's views, and she was comforted by the belief expressed in her mother's goodness. She had had a definite direction given her, and to one with a nature like hers it was also a consolation, as it involved action. She would go home and face the unpleasant surroundings, the gossip of the neighbours, with courage.

She never for a second doubted that her husband was there watching for her return. She had followed the letter she had sent him in thought ; she saw his kind eyes reading it, and knew he was sorry for her. Then, enlightened by some words about wifely duty, wifely obedience, she caught her breath for a moment, and possible displeasure on his part, for the very first time came to her mind.

Arrived at the hotel, she pushed on her preparations, and sat down to read those letters. It was barely twelve. She ordered luncheon, and arranged to take her departure at one o'clock—a good deal to the dismay of the landlady, who had counted upon having a rich English lady and her maid for a considerable time with her.

CHAPTER VII.

OLD MR. WYNCOTE TO THE RESCUE.

MR. BURLINGTON'S annoyance and displeasure were, it must be allowed, very justifiable when he found that his wife had gone abroad without consulting him. It is true that she had declared her intention of not seeing him, but he had treated that as one of those threats which are uttered in haste, and are never intended to be carried out, and it had not gone deep. He was startled now to find that it had not been an idle threat. To a man so completely accustomed to regularity of the domestic atmosphere, where even the change of an under-

servant caused a slight sensation, and where punctuality and decorum reigned, it was very bewildering.

It seemed to him that his part became more difficult to play every day. It was equally evident to him that his love for his wife, with all her faults, was tenfold what it had been. Even underlying all this irritation was the consciousness that the postponement of that complete reconciliation in reality hurt it most.

Aunt Anne was in despair, trying to be just, doing her best to say what might console him on the one hand, and what she honestly felt upon the other in extenuation. It was a step she could not understand. She understood still less that one of Mrs. Burlington's charms in her eyes was her fearlessness and her originality. If she had been asked, she would have accounted for her affection by talking of her truthfulness. But to be absolutely truthful there must be fearlessness.

"I am so sorry for you, dear Cyril! It must make you anxious. Poor Maria! I wish we knew exactly what she has been told. It is not like her to go off without one line to explain things, and yet I do not know—it is like her if she could not tell all the truth. She is so frank, you know."

"We shall never know all the truth till she does tell us; we shall hear it from no one else!" said Mr. Burlington, shortly.

"That is severe, but I think you are right. I am afraid Mrs. Kingson has a way of putting things. I ought not to say it, I suppose. It is very wrong, but yes! I do think she is too much afraid of hurting and vexing one."

"Too smooth and a moral coward," summed up Mr. Burlington. "Well, Aunt Anne, I must go abroad too. There is nothing else to be done."

"My dear Cyril, must you? Yes, of course, you are right, and yet supposing she comes back and finds you absent?"

"You see, dear Aunt Anne, our temporary separation is known to no one but ourselves. If it gets about that my wife has gone abroad, and that I am in England, imagine how people would talk, and we must guard against putting any difficulties in the way of her going home. We must not make things harder for her."

Against this reasoning poor Aunt Anne had nothing to say or to urge, and she cheerfully agreed to remain where she was, and to let Cyril know everything that took place during his absence.

"It is much better than my being at home. I am such a stupid woman about keeping things quiet, or concealing anything," she said; "and if the neighbours asked me any questions, I might give a wrong impression from anxiety not to say anything misleading."

The wisdom of Mr. Burlington's arrangement was not long of proving itself in a practical fashion. The very afternoon after his departure, as Aunt

Anne was sitting reading, or rather trying to read and to fix her thoughts on her book, the door opened, and Miss Flora Harrington was announced; Flora, very smart, in a tremendously tight gown and exuberant spirits. She was very effusive.

"Delighted to find you in, dear Miss Burlington. I am so thankful! I have been dying to hear all about everything. How are you, and how is poor Mr. Burlington?"

"I am very well, thank you. Are you staying in town?"

"Yes," and Flora cast down her eyes, bit her very red lips, and looked conscious with all her might. "I'll tell you all about myself afterwards. What I want to know now is all about poor dear Molly. Dear! how sad it all is! and what is poor Mr. Burlington going to do? Where is Molly, Miss Burlington!"

"In France."

"And poor Mr. Burlington here! How sad!"

"Mr. Burlington is also in France," said Aunt Anne, not without a slight inward qualm and acutely conscious that she was purposely misleading the young lady, who, under cover of much commiseration, was overflowing with curiosity, and impertinent curiosity.

"In France!" A thousand notes of astonishment and incredulity were plainly heard in Miss Harrington's tone of voice.

"They are both in France," said Miss Burlington in a perfectly matter-of-fact tone.

Flora changed her position, and drew a little nearer to Miss Burlington. Then she said, "You do not place any confidence in me, dear Miss Burlington, and I am sorry, because, if you did, I think I could help you!"

"May I ask in what way, Miss Harrington, supposing that I want—help?" Aunt Anne's voice was not friendly or cordial. She could not forget that this girl was at the bottom of all the mischief,

and, though, as a rule, lenient in her judgments, she was not predisposed in favour of a young lady who was so exactly the opposite of everything she considered a young lady should be. "I understand, Miss Harrington, that my niece and you parted—well, not on very friendly terms. You are extremely kind; but till I know exactly what you mean, how can I possibly answer your question in any other way? I am not at all a good hand at guessing anything."

"It is quite true," answered Flora, a little daunted by the other lady's manner. "Dear Molly was upset, excited... Oh!" she added carrying the war well into the enemy's country. "It was cruel never telling her anything. Poor dear thing! how little she thought of her marriage, and how much too good she thought herself for poor Mr. Burlington."

This was hard for Aunt Anne, but she was loyal to her nephew's wife. Looking at Miss Har-

rington, she asked herself whether the girl was only a fool, or whether she was malicious?

Miss Harrington was getting a little uncomfortable, she had plenty of impudence, but the calm scrutinising gaze of the well-bred lady before her put her a good deal out of countenance. "I have not told you my news," she said in a rather hurried manner, "and I daresay it will not interest you very much. Still perhaps you will pass it on to Molly—that is if you happen to know her address."

"Very well," answered Aunt Anne.

"I am going to be married. I am to marry a very nice man, passionately in love with me, not very much money, but, as I have seen for myself, that does not make happiness! We love each other!" she said with a sentimental gaze at Aunt Anne's cap.

"I am glad" said Aunt Anne. "It is a great happiness to love and be beloved. I trust yours may be a very happy marriage."

Her courtesy and her kind tone touched Flora Harrington's selfish, worldly nature. She felt it undeserved. Real tears came into her eyes. A good deal of her aggressiveness dropped from her, and she said in a low voice "Thank you!"

"May I ask his name?—and you say he is not rich; has he a profession?"

"Yes; his name is a good one—Harley. He is something in the city. He is a very good man; so noble."

"It is a great thing, indeed," said Aunt Anne with all sincerity, "to make such a marriage. It is the happiest lot for husband or wife when admiration and love go hand in hand!"

Flora rose; and, after bidding her good-bye, she came back from the door and said, "Miss Burlington, you may know it already, but if you do not . . . I know Mrs. Burlington wished to find out something about her mother. I may be perfectly wrong, but from one or two things he said I think there is

one man who could tell you everything about her."

"Yes," said Aunt Anne; "who is he?"

"Mr. Wyncote."

Miss Burlington sank back in her chair. The idea that presented itself made her very unhappy.

"Mr. Wyncote!" she repeated, in a faint voice.

"Yes. It is perhaps trifling—very trifling---when repeated; but one day he said to himself, '*She is very like that picture, but oh! how unlike the reality now.*' I laughed, and asked him what he was dreaming about, that he was talking out loud. Then he looked grave and said, 'I was thinking of a woman's past and present.' Then he immediately changed the conversation. I think '*the reality now*' meant Mrs. Burlington's mother!"

She did not wait to be thanked, but she went away at once. She had gone full of a wish to give Aunt Anne an uncomfortable time, and to pay off all old scores. She left the house conscious of having been subdued and softened by the dignified

calm of the old lady, and her genuine kindness about her marriage.

"It was generous of her to say it all so nicely," she thought, "for I know I am very antagonistic to her, and that, as much as it is in her to hate any one, she hates me!"

At any rate, she had left Aunt Anne much to think about. She got up and walked up and down the room. She was perturbed and terribly anxious. It was a difficult question for any one to have to answer, to one of her temperament doubly difficult. Did she wish, *for the honour of her family*, to find Maria's mother—a woman who had broken her marriage vows, and had broken the seventh commandment? What would Cyril do in the circumstances? What would he wish? and Maria....

She knew that her one wish was to bring these two together to live once more in concord and happiness. She would do anything in the world to gain this end. All her indecision fled as she put

this aim before her, and this poor lady, who until then had never made a decision for herself, made one then. She made up her mind to write at once to Mr. Wyncote, to appeal to him—if need be, to confide in him—and ask him, if he could help her, to help her now! She would be guided by circumstances afterwards. If Mrs. Burlington's mother had sunk into wretchedness she could be relieved, and Cyril would help. But it would be better to know, and to put an end to all the misery, all the uncertainty hanging over their house. Without giving herself time to change her mind or to worry herself by considering the question in its wider aspect Aunt Anne sat down and wrote to Mr. Wyncote.

He would be surprised by a letter from her; but she wanted to know whether he could tell her anything of Mrs. Kingson (née Rorke), of her present abode, if alive, and whether there was any reason why she might not be received by her nephew and

his wife. It was certainly a diplomatic letter, and Miss Burlington was justly proud of it. Then, having sent it off, she nerved herself to await an answer which might be of such immense importance to them all.

Between that evening and the second day of the departure of her letter, Miss Burlington had many unhappy moments. All those proverbs about letting things alone danced before her eyes, to her great torment. Had she done wrong? and, if harm came, was her motive one that would excuse her to Cyril and his wife? She suffered much, and she had spasms of regret. Why had she interfered?

So often the reasons that appeared so pressing and so excellent before we commit ourselves to a line of action appear so insufficient afterwards!

Her letter was despatched on a Tuesday, and on Thursday Miss Burlington got her answer. Not in the shape of a letter. A visitor was announced; and the tall figure of old Mr. Wyncote, the man

who never left his home, stood before her, looking huge in the small room to which (in the absence of Cyril) his aunt had betaken herself.

“I have come to answer your letter in person,” he said, in his deep and pleasant voice, “and I will begin by stating two facts. Mrs. Kingson lives; and there is no reason why your nephew and her daughter should object to seeing her in their house. There is every reason why they should be proud of doing so.”

CHAPTER VIII.

FRIENDS?

AUNT ANNE, accustomed to self-control, and not a woman given to tears as a rule, was quite overcome by an answer so consolatory. Two big tears rolled over her face, and made the man before her understand better than anything else could have done the tension of feeling under which her appeal to him had been made. He honoured her for the evidence of so much feeling, and having come more because he was thankful at last to have an opportunity of vindicating the woman his brother had so passionately loved and whose story was so dread-

fully sad, he was anxious now to relieve Miss Burlington's anxiety also.

"Yes," he said, "Mrs. Kingson lives, and has lived ever since her daughter's marriage, near us and near you. She is frail and delicate, as any woman must be who, from the highest, purest, and most unselfish motives, lives a life of seclusion and repression, seeing no one, and living without companionship, without affection, without friends.

"Her aim and object all along have been the good of her child. For her good she has deprived herself of her society. Wherever her daughter has been, at school or in London, there she has made her home, and seeing her well, happy, and prosperous contented her."

"But why?" asked Miss Burlington. "If she is what you say, why has she thought this necessary?"

"Because she made one mistake, though she committed no sin. She was married by a trick, by a fraud, to Mr. Kingson, whom she did not love,

and thus parted from the man she loved. Mr. Kingson was an unspeakable villain! He drank, and the life she led with him was horrible.

“She knew nothing of the law, or of the protection she might have claimed; he had sent away her child, and he nearly killed her. She thought the only way out of his clutches was to run away in such a manner as to make him believe the worst; and, poor soul, this she did. There was but one man in the world whom, for her sake, for the sake of the days when they had been all the world to each other—my brother, in short—she could trust to help her, to act with her!

“He did help her, he left home with her—took care to be seen with her leaving the house. He took her straight to the convent, and left her there. By her own wish they never met again. You know the rest of the story, I think. Mr. Kingson sent a challenge to my brother, whom he believed and hoped had left the country, and my brother

accepted the challenge, and killed the meanest wretch the earth ever received.

"Mrs. Kingson had a small income, and she took rooms as near her child as possible. I am not certain," said Mr. Wyncote, after some hesitation, "but I think that when the shock and horror of it all had passed in some degree she thought she had taken an exaggerated view of her position, and I fancy she had an interview more than once with her sister-in-law, the aunt in whose hands her child was placed."

This was a startling idea to Miss Burlington. Was it possible that Mrs. Kingson knew of the mother's nearness, and that she was blameless? And, if this was so, what motive had weighed with her and prompted her actions?

Mr. Wyncote sat down near her. "It must be a difficult position for you in many ways, Miss Burlington," he said, with very real sympathy; "but you can, perhaps, enter into all I feel about

it. No, not all, for you do not know the mother—the gentlest and most unselfish of human beings. Think what it must have been for her to make a life apart from her child, sacrificing the happiness of her whole life rather than risk that child's future! Her life blameless, and yet secluding herself as if she was guilty. My poor brother was a reckless man, and talked and acted wildly enough. It was the loss of the girl he so passionately loved that drove him to despair. It was his love for that same woman that enabled him to play the part he did regarding her, and then, in a frenzy of horror, and deeper despair, made him rejoice in the opportunity afforded him of punishing the author of his misery and hers! I do not defend him. But if I had time to tell you of that man's treachery, how my marriage was twisted into being his, and how that poor soul was hunted and persecuted!—”

He stopped, for Miss Burlington's face showed

how deeply she felt his words, and he was anxious not to distress her. He had succeeded in giving her a better impression of Mrs. Kingson, and he hoped that through her a reunion of mother and daughter might be brought about in the future.

“You have placed a new and very hopeful solution to our difficulties before me,” said Miss Burlington, very gratefully. “It is kind of you to have come, because these things gain by being told as you have told me the story of Maria’s mother. Maria has gone to France to trace her mother. She imagined her to be there. My nephew has followed her. Deception of any kind hurts in the end, and in return for your kindness I will tell you all that has passed and how it came to pass.”

“You may feel sure your confidence will not be given to an unworthy or an untrustworthy man,” said Mr. Wyncote gravely, reading in her face all the conflicting emotions which he could so thoroughly understand.

Then Miss Burlington told him how all had been concealed from her nephew's wife, and how at last it had been blurted out, and the bad effects of this sudden revelation.

"It seems to me that one satisfaction lies in this painful story which is frequently absent from other events."

"One satisfaction!"

"Yes; the blame can be put upon the right head," he answered grimly. "From beginning to end Mrs. Kingson seems to have acted with but one object in view, how best to secure her own ends. She took the child because her husband insisted, and she could not help herself. Then she wanted to turn her beauty and talents to account, and use them to draw pleasant society round her. Then she got rid of her, and, being a weak as well as a worldly woman, once her object was achieved, she turned upon her and rent her." This summary was, if severe, too true to be contradicted.

The question now pressing upon Miss Burlington was what her next step was to be.

And it came as a surprise to Mr. Wyncote, who did not know much of feminine idiosyncrasies, that the woman who had opened her heart to him—a stranger,—and who had shown great decision in a momentous question, should now be so vacillating and so wavering.

Whether to wait for Cyril's return or to make friends with Maria's mother, and surprise the two on their return by a personal acquaintance with the object of their search, seemed to present to her alternately advantages or disadvantages.

Mr. Wyncote could not follow the swift working of her mind. He himself was most eager, most anxious, to take good news and good tidings to the unselfish, brave woman he had learned to reverence as he did reverence Maria's mother.

But, though the complex attitude of Miss Burlington's mind was a problem he could not solve,

he was fully aware of a truth only too often forgotten; that if any good is to come of an action involving thought, it must arise spontaneously and from conviction, and not from outside influence; therefore he sat silent, saying no word to bias her decision. Then it came.

"I should like to see Mrs. Kingson. I should like to become acquainted with a mother so unselfish as you represent her to be—as indeed she must be," added Aunt Anne, with a tender inflection in her voice.

"I am sure you are right. I am sure you will like her," Mr. Wyncote said heartily.

"And how is it to be managed?" Aunt Anne once more seemed a little bewildered.

Mr. Wyncote smiled. "Mrs. Kingson will come up to London; she will come and see you, or will you go and find her? She will go to a private hotel I know of."

"Oh, I will go and see her. I want to pay her every respect," said Miss Burlington, heartily.

Mr. Wyncote knew now that the cause was won. He was offered, and accepted, luncheon. He was a delightful companion, had read much, and quite won Aunt Anne's heart by his appreciation of books she cared for. Somehow, the old traditions of his wild conduct, and of the reckless behaviour of his brother, had kept him from making friends with his neighbours, added to his own love of a secluded life.

Aunt Anne began to see that in the past her judgment had been narrow and prejudiced. How often she had been in deadly anxiety for fear this man should acquire any influence over Cyril! Now she asked herself what she had dreaded. They parted with a friendly feeling on both sides, and Miss Burlington began a letter to Cyril explaining what had passed, and leaving it open that she might add her impressions of his "mother-in-law."

How she prayed and trusted that the picture set before her by Mr. Wyncote might be realised, and her invitation to be friends justified by the happiest results.

CHAPTER IX.

ALONE IN LONDON.

MARIA, much to her maid's surprise, elected to travel alone, and she sent her maid into a separate carriage. She gave a substantial *pourboire* to the guard, and, complaining bitterly of headache (no idle complaint!), she lay down in the carriage, and shrouded herself in darkness, as much as possible.

Satisfied that she would be left for some little time to herself, she pushed aside the curtain on the farther side of the carriage, and, drawing out the packet of letters, she read with absorbing interest the scanty details of her mother's life. As she read,

her eyes flashed and her lips curved into a smile. Truth lay on every page. "Even with no other proof than this, my husband will believe! Thank God! Thank God!" she said. Then she thought bitterly of her mother's trials and humiliations. The great unselfishness throughout struck her with overwhelming force; that this life of repression or seclusion, without a friend to cheer her, or society of any kind, without affection, for which she evidently pined, should have been lived through and endured for her sake, thrilled her with pain. "My mother!" she murmured, half aloud. "My poor mother! Ah, how can I make amends? how can I ever make up to her for all these years?"

Who was it that she talked of having seen occasionally, who came between her and the happiness she craved for? Some of her letters written to the Mother Superior were written from week to week in the shape of a diary, and here she spoke of having seen her child. There was one incident which

sent the tears to Maria's eyes, of how she had purposely stood a little in the way, so that in passing the child might touch her. "She brushed past me and felt the contact, turned round and said, 'I beg your pardon!' What a smile she has! and how she could love!" wrote the poor mother.

The journey came to an end before Maria had finished re-reading for the twentieth time the record of her mother's unselfish devotion. She was startled when she found herself in the gathering darkness once more in Paris. Forgetting that her maid knew nothing of her newly-found hopes, she astonished her by her determination not to sleep in Paris. She must go on.

"But you will over-fatigue yourself, ma'am; you must need rest."

"Rest! Oh, I shall only rest when I reach home." Then, with a new-born consideration, foreign to her character, she added, with utmost courtesy, "Unless you are very tired. I am longing to meet my hus-

band! I am counting the moments till I get home!"

Never was anyone much more surprised than Rutter. Too well trained, however, to betray any surprise, she hurried to arrange everything, leaving Mrs. Burlington to await her return with all the patience she could muster. It was a heavenly night, and Mrs. Burlington sat on deck, a prey to a thousand conflicting feelings and emotions. She began to see so much that was hateful to herself, and that must have been so distasteful to her husband, in the way in which she had carried out her plan and gone off alone.

Suppose that her husband refused to receive her, and refused to believe her? All at once, just as she had gained one part of her aim, and was wildly happy at having done so, the carelessness about his wishes, the self-will with which she had followed her bent, without any consideration for his feelings, became visible to her.

She sat the whole time on deck allowing the

salt spray to touch her face, and thinking of these things as she had never thought before. She was roused by an American voice, though the voice was not as aggressive as that of Miss Lavinia Jemima Stocks.

"Did you choose your place by accident or by design?" said the American lady. It was too dark to see her distinctly, but she was tall, and appeared tremendously wrapped up.

"By design; the centre of the ship a little forward is the best place, though I am a very good sailor. I prefer having my back to the other passengers, and I love the fresh sea breeze."

"Ah, yes, yes. Is there room for two?" she asked, coming alarmingly near.

"I am afraid not," answered Mrs. Burlington, very coldly.

"Yes, yes, I see; you're a little high. Now what on earth's the use of being high here? You're alone; I'm alone; and I saw you sitting enjoying

yourself just when I felt squeamish, and I said to myself, Arabella Minson, you go by that lady and ask to share privileges. So I came."

"I have no privileges. I have a headache, and I sought solitude."

"Air you married?"

"Yes."

"Fancy that! and you air alone. Why?"

Mrs. Burlington laughed.

"Now, what does that laugh mean?"

"It means that I am amused."

"You're a Britisher?"

"I am an English woman."

"And when you're asked a plain question you won't give a plain answer."

"Why should I answer you? I do not know you. It is not our habit to talk to strangers, and to tell them all about our private affairs."

"Yes, yes, yes, you're high. Well, you think tall things of yourself; but one of the biggest

people in America is in this ship; and she and me, we talked a good bit together. We are all on one slab in America, you know."

At that moment two people came upon the scene. A tall, slight figure with a fur cloak on her arm. A man was with her.

In a peculiarly pretty, refined voice she said, "I am afraid there is not a chair to be had, and it is impossible to breathe downstairs."

"I have a chair here I can give you," said Maria, as she moved her feet off one in front of her and pushed it gently upon one side.

"I am so much obliged to you. But I hardly like to deprive you of it."

Mrs. Burlington would hear of no denial, and the lady sat down at a short distance; then the man arranged a cloak round her and left her.

Mrs. Burlington was charmed to see that this new arrival had had the effect of sending the inquisitive American away. She laughed and said,

"What funny people Americans are! There was a woman here just now who took me to task for not answering questions about my domestic affairs!"

"I suppose that was Miss Minson."

"Yes. Do you know her?"

"Yes," answered the stranger, in a peculiar tone.

"All Americans seem so funny," pursued Mrs. Burlington, "there was a dreadful woman in France—Miss Lavinia Stocks—I did not know how to get rid of her!"

"Do you know many Americans?"

"Well, you have now brought me to book. I only know two; but I suppose they are average specimens of their country!"

"If you call me at all an acquaintance, you now know three. I am an American. Pray do not be vexed or annoyed! I was afraid if I did not tell you at once you might say something worse of my country people. I am very fond of my country, and very proud of being an American," she added, laughing lightly.

"I do not know how to apologize; but it is quite impossible to believe that you are of the same race as Miss Lavinia Stocks, or that person!"

"And yet I fancy you have heard cockneys speak, and are acquainted with provincial dialects in England?"

"Of course; but she told me of some lady on board here who was one of the biggest people in America, and very friendly with her, and that they were 'on the same slab.'"

"We are a little boastful, I suppose," said the lady, laughing. "I suppose I am the person she considers the biggest person in America. My husband is very rich. We are Bostonians. Miss Minson comes to Paris and London every year to see the fashions. She is a very clever dressmaker, and one of three sisters who have a large dressmaking business in New York. I employ them a good deal. I have known them for years."

Mrs. Burlington felt horribly ashamed of herself. "You have given me a lesson," she said in a tone of apology.

“O, no! I meant nothing of the kind; but I always feel regarding ourselves, as well as about you, and, indeed, with regard to all nations, how much better it would be if we knew a little more really of each other. You take two very pushing vulgar women as types of American ladies. We take solitary prominent cases of immorality among the English upper ten, and moralize over the immorality of all as a nation.

“I have been much in England, much in France and Germany. I have friends everywhere, while American to my very finger tips. I will honestly make one confession—that in point of honour, manliness, and refinement no race can produce the equal of a well-bred, well-born, well-principled Briton! That is the result of my travels, and it is the opinion of most Americans who have seen the world.”

Maria said to herself, “Like my husband.”

Dover was now reached. The two bid each other good-bye, and in the midst of the bustle and scramble

that ensued, while she was standing back to be out of the turmoil, Miss Minson addressed her, "Well, you should be a proud woman. Mrs. Farley Peyton has been affable to you!"

At that moment Maria's maid came up to her, saying, "I have sent the luggage to the Lord Warden, and have got a cab, ma'am."

"Dear me!" said Miss Minson aloud. "If I'd known she had a personal attendant, which means money, I'd have done a deal with her!"

Maria did not wish to stay in London, and she did not intend to take the maid (who was only with her for the journey) beyond London. She slept at Dover, went to London next morning, and on homewards.

She was seen into the train for Worcestershire and was whirling towards her husband's place with her thoughts busy and anxious enough. Her independent step seemed much graver as she neared Burlington, and she rehearsed her arrival till she

was tired. How would her husband look? How would he receive her?

With a very thick veil over her face she got into a cab and told the man to take her there. He hesitated and said, "If you expect to find some of the family there you'll be disappointed, ma'am. The house is shut up, and Mr. and Mrs. Burlington are away, have been away for ever so long."

"And the old house, Miss Burlington's?"

"That's shut up too. Miss Burlington's with the others. The gardeners look after the grounds, and there's the housemaids and Mrs. Butt, no one else. It's just a blank in the country, no coming and going now."

Maria, who had been wound up to the highest pitch of expectation, and who was painfully conscious of great fatigue, was driven to a small hotel, where she had tea, and the first train back to London took her there.

But fatigue and the disappointment and reaction

of it all sent the tears rolling over her face, and she wept till she was exhausted.

Then a most provoking and exasperating thing happened. She tried in vain to remember the name of the place in Kensington where she had found herself on recovering from her fever. She could remember neither the name of the street nor the number. Indeed, she had never heard either. She had been too ill to take any notice at first, and her mind had been very full of other things afterwards. She remembered having driven from place to place; but cudgel her brains as she would, she could remember nothing more!

What was she to do? Go back to her uncle's house and entreat them to take her in?

Never! She would die first.

By the time she had reached London it was very late—too late to wander about or look for rooms. She went to the hotel nearest the station and resolved to write from there to her uncle. Then she

made a disagreeable discovery. She had spent her last shilling, and she was not sure that she could get a cheque cashed here where no one knew her. At the small town nearest to Burlington she might have had everything done; now she felt extremely helpless. If she gave her cheque, it would put her into a terribly awkward position if the landlord refused to cash it. What was she to do? She sat down and wrote to her uncle, and confident of his coming to her at once and of his putting everything right for her, she asked the people at the hotel to send the note for her. In about an hour the messenger returned. The house was shut up and no one was there.

Terribly put out by this fresh misfortune, Mrs. Burlington refused any refreshment, afraid of incurring expense, and crept into bed fasting, which did not conduce to her comfort. It was wonderful to her how she came to find herself in this extraordinary position. In all her life such a want had

never touched her, and she lay sleepless, thinking over her future plans, and how she was to get out of her difficulty next morning. It occurred to her that she might find the address of the doctor who had attended her, and summon him to her aid, and when this thought came to her she fell asleep.

CHAPTER X.

NEAR THE NORTH LODGE.

THE North Lodge, as it was called, which faced the woods of Wyncote Hundred, stood a little apart from the gate; and between the park gates and the Wyncote Woods ran a narrow road—one of those country roads which at one time or another had been a high road, and that, owing to improvements, railroads, and other and shorter roads, had dropped into disuse, and was in a great measure overgrown with turf, affording now only an eccentric path for riding or walking. A few yards up stood a cottage on the Wyncote property; a pretty garden with

flowers and espaliers, fruit and flowers in friendly companionship, sloped down to the narrowed road. Up the grassy banks were those lovely wild flowers that form the joy of children and botanists alike. The cottage had the well-kept look which characterises one in the hands of some one of refinement. The flowers were carefully tied up, and the masses of colour, arranged very artistically, made a brilliant setting for the pretty little place.

Inside the place was extremely pretty. The walls were distempered in pale grey and very pretty original groups of flowers here and there gave an unusual charm, and formed a subdued yet a very cheerful background to dainty furniture, evidently retrieved from some place of far greater importance, and yet not too large for the modest size of the rooms. Entering, one had an impression that it was more the boudoir of a grande dame in some château than the one sitting-room of a very small two-storied cottage. The one occupant of the room

was a small, slightly deformed, and yet graceful woman, with silvery white hair and very large dark eyes.

She had some exquisitely fine church work on her lap, which she had been doing till the waning light put a stop to her occupation. She lay in her high-backed chair with its two arms supporting her little white hands, waiting for the light she had called for. The expression of her eyes was melancholy, but her mouth, with its upward curve, betrayed a temperament more fitted for laughter than tears. She was more interesting than beautiful, there was so much expression in her face. Her servant brought in a lamp, set it down, drew the curtains, and fastened the shutters, and in a few minutes returned with a cup of chocolate and some rusks. Mrs. Kingson—for it was indeed Mrs. Burlington's mother—smiled her thanks, and for that one moment her eyes lost their look of melancholy, and smiled also.

The servant did not speak, but nodded and left the room. She was deaf and dumb.

Mrs. Kingson sipped her chocolate and eat her rusks with the abstracted air of one whose mind is preoccupied, and who simply eats to live. "I am fanciful and stupid," she said aloud, and, rising, took her lamp in her hand and went to find a book.

She was difficult to please. One volume after another was looked at and rejected, and she was still standing undecided, when a step on the gravel startled her. In a few moments her servant came in with a card—Mr. Wyncote's. Her mistress signed to her to let him come in, and old Mr. Wyncote came in. He shook hands, and sat down facing her.

"You have news," she said, in a voice of repressed excitement; "it is kind of you to come."

"I have news, and very good news, for you."

She pressed her hands together with a sudden, peculiar gesture, and did not speak.

"Miss Burlington has sent me to you as her

ambassador," he said, speaking very quietly, and watching her face.

She grew very pale, but she still kept silence. Her eyes never left his face.

"It is her great wish to see you. When Mrs. Burlington—when your daughter returns, Miss Burlington wishes her to find you friends."

"It is very wonderful," she said, in a dreamy voice; "after all these years."

Mr. Wyncote was much relieved. He was so much afraid of agitation or excitement for her, knowing that there was great delicacy, and that the doctor attributed this delicacy to a very weak heart. But though he had written to tell her of Maria's departure, and all that had happened, as far as he knew it, he was wise enough to feel certain that no preparation would be of use regarding this, and that the bare fact simply put before her would be his best course. He rose and moved over to the bookshelf, affecting to examine the titles of the books

by the light of the lamp she had hastily set down on his entrance. Then she spoke, and he went towards her. "You are so kind, so thoughtful. Will you tell me more now? Tell me everything."

"I have so little to add to what I have told you. Mrs. Burlington went abroad to find you, full of that one idea. She is an impetuous young lady, it appears. Of course she will not find you, and she will come back again. Miss Burlington has always been extremely adverse to her having been kept in ignorance of her story, and she is very anxious now that you should be at hand, and that when Mrs. Burlington returns she should see for herself that you are..."

"That I am received—that I am considered respectable! Mr. Wyncote, you are an honest and a good man. Will you tell me the truth?"

"Certainly."

"Will my doing this make dispeace between my child and her husband? Will it make her life more difficult?"

"No, certainly; why should it?"

"Because accepting me in the abstract is one thing; seeing me claim his wife as my own, my very own, child, is another. He looks good and kind; but, is he not a little prejudiced? Think well, Mr. Wyncote, I am accustomed to my lot. I can bear it. I can bear anything," she exclaimed with sudden fire and passion—"anything except spoiling her life.... After all these years," she added, calming down again, with a sob in her voice infinitely pathetic to the man who heard it, and who knew what her life had been, "do you believe that, from a selfish wish to gratify my craving for her society, I would risk anything likely to endanger her happiness!"

"But, I assure you, all is so clear now in the eyes of Miss Burlington and her nephew that there is no danger of this, and, my dear sister, your experience, the lessons of your life, are just what Mrs. Burlington needs. She has a strong will, a

great belief in herself superior to her surroundings. Pride when it falls is apt to break something."

"Pray Heaven it be neither a heart nor a high spirit," she said, softly. "I am in your hands, Mr. Wyncote; when shall I go?"

"To-morrow. We can go to London together."

She shook her head. "No. I would rather be alone, go alone!"

"Very well," he said rising, "I can meet you in town. Will you go to this address?" he said, giving her Miss Burlington's number. "Not in the first place, of course; but when you are settled. Where will you go at first?"

"Anywhere, every place is indifferent to me," she said, with a voice so faint and exhausted that he was immediately conscious how much she needed rest, how tremendously this news affected her, and how great the control she had exercised over herself must have been.

"Suppose you go to the hotel near the station

in London for a day or two?" he suggested. "I know the people; you would be very comfortable there."

"An hotel!" she said, with a gesture of distaste.

"You would not dislike this hotel; you could be as quiet as you liked. The landlady was in old days one of our servants, a nice good woman. Can you think of a better plan?"

"No," she answered, "for so long I have simply lived in rooms. Till you arranged this charming place for me I took rooms where I could get them nearest her, and rooms somehow never make me feel at home. I will go to your hotel."

"And I will order rooms for you there. Good night."

He left her, as always on the rare occasions on which she received him, with a feeling of intense respect for her unselfishness and admiration for her self-control and absence of hysterical protestations. He had carried through a very difficult communi-

cation, and she had made it simple and easy for him. Alas! how one act of folly, the appearance of wrong, had been allowed to mar and spoil her whole life! Ignorant of the protection the law would have given her, and maddened by the insults and cruelties heaped upon her by a drunkard, she had taken a step which, while innocent, was purposely made to appear guilty in the eyes of the world. Who, in these circumstances, would believe in her innocence? Then, in her anxiety to make up to her child for an action she was soon made to feel was wrong, she had given her up.

* * * *

Mr. Wyncote wrote for rooms, and made every possible arrangement for her comfort. But two days passed before the poor lady could leave her room. The agitation the strain, and the reaction, told upon her, and a prolonged fainting fit forced her to keep her bed—too ill to fret over delay, too full of suffering to note the flight of time. Then

she started, attended by her deaf and dumb maid; and, by one of those accidents which are common enough in life, but which we call extraordinary, mother and daughter for the first time for years were under the same roof, utterly unaware of it, passing each other in the hall as strangers.

CHAPTER XI.

ON HER FOOTSTEPS.

MR. BURLINGTON waited in Paris to receive his letters. He had a conviction that his wife, acting on her impulse, would write when she had decided upon her course of action. He knew her so well now—swift decision, without giving him a chance of opposing her plans, then an anxiety to make amends. How often he thought over the position in which she had been put, and how severely he blamed himself for having allowed Mrs. Kingson's plausible and urgent representations to weigh with him against his better judgment. If we look back

at our lives dispassionately, is it not true that the misery or unhappiness of our lives brings the words "if only" more bitterly to our lips than any others? Things which we strove to achieve, and which we thought of such consequence that we never rested till we had achieved them, appear insignificant by the light of experience—dwarfed by the fruitless results that followed our hardly-won success. And, on the other hand, trifles we thought so unimportant have consequences that follow us through all our lives, and affect our happiness, and often the happiness of others.

Now, as Mr. Burlington had justly foreseen, Maria's newly-born sense of all her husband had done for her and her own new sense of an affection—all unconsciously betrayed to him—had made the letter which she had sent from Kensington, and which he received in Paris, one unlike any he had ever received from her. Here he also heard from Aunt Anne about Mr. Wyncote's visit. Already

he was thinking of his wife as one more sinned against than sinning; now he threw reason to the winds, and forgot that she had ever offended. He followed in her track to Angers, made inquiry, and landed finally at the hotel where she had last been.

Miss Lavinia Jemima Stocks was there, and lost no time in introducing herself to him as one who had made great friends with his wife. This he much doubted, but he responded to her civilities, as she could give him the most recent information about her.

She doled out her news in a way that much irritated him, but he soon found that if he did not allow her to tell her story her own way, he was not likely to hear it at all.

"Wall," she said, "your wife ran round here in a very remarkable way. She was as active as popped corn on a frying-pan, and I can't say more than that. Just once in the twenty-four hours I saw her, and that's a fact. But I know where she went for all that. Is your wife a Roman?"

"If you mean is my wife a member of that Church, she is not."

"If you like to use sixteen dozen words to express a meaning I put in one, you may," said Miss Stocks, with a superb smile. "We Americans go to the point at once, and we say out just what we think without circumnavigation."

Mr. Burlington expressed his impatience and his sense of amusement, and merely bowed.

"Wall—if she's not a Roman why did she go to the convent, stay in the convent, and come back from the convent with eyes the colour of cochineals squashed?" asked Miss Stocks. "A little of the black gowns, long faces, and grey walls and gloom and all the rest of it goes a very long way with me and with all rational people who are not hysterical idiots; and your wife seemed to be 'cute—for a Britisher—and it didn't strike me she was hysterical."

"My wife came to find a relative, and was much disappointed and grieved at not finding her."

"Oh, I suppose she put that in the letter she wrote you from here. You see she said she had a husband. Wall, of course, that might be true, and again it might not; but I saw your name and address on the letters because I made it my business to look," said Miss Stocks, coolly. "Not that addressing your letter and writing one to you proves that you are her husband,"

"Of course not," said Mr. Burlington, seeing that the last course had come, and conscious of pure gratitude that dinner was nearly over.

"Wall, I will say you have not much gift in the talking way. Why, you have hardly said twelve words since you sat down, and those twelve were not remarkable words—that's a fact."

Mr. Burlington laughed. "I am extremely tired. I have a great deal to occupy my thoughts just now. I am a dull companion, for I am thinking of other things."

"Wall, that's frank!" exclaimed Miss Stocks,

wheeling round on her chair, and gazing at him in some perplexity. "You've come from England. You don't travel with your wife. That's odd. She says she has lots to think of. You say the same thing. She goes to the convent. I dare say you are going there too. If you do just alike, think alike, and act alike, what I want to know is, why aren't you together?" said Miss Stocks, eying him sideways as she spoke.

"You see, we do not discuss our private affairs with strangers," said Mr. Burlington, who had got beyond the stage of being amused, and was now intensely bored by the woman beside him.

"Wall," said Miss Stocks, "that beats creation and everything else. Those very words are Mrs. Burlington's words. She is Mrs. Burlington, I guess."

"She is my wife, and I must go now. I have business," said Cyril curtly.

"You're wrong to cut your meal short. There's

a tart coming—and fruit?” said Miss Stocks very solemnly.

Mr. Burlington waited for neither of these temptations. He hurried to his room, and went from there to get a voiture, and drove to the convent. He went with much anxiety. It was only natural that, as regarded Maria's mother, he took perhaps the worst view of her conduct. The story Mr. Wyncote told sounded so incredible, so romantic. And romance to many minds appears in the light of wrong. To a prosaic mind what is out of the beaten path has a flavour of harm, and Mr. Burlington, reared in somewhat narrow lines had almost as much to unlearn, almost as many prejudices to get rid of, as his wife had to learn the lesson of life and respect prejudices founded on principle.

His interview with the Mother Superior was one he never forgot. He was deeply touched to find how generously and lovingly his wife had spoken of him, and he was more thankful than he could

say to hear all that the good old nun told him about his mother-in-law. It seemed strange to think of her as living, and living near him still, he believed.

Of course there were many difficulties. People might talk, and their talk might be ill-natured; but with his firm belief now in all that he was told in the present which tallied exactly with Mr. Wyncote's story of the past, he felt afraid of nothing.

The Mother Superior was much taken with her visitor, and she approved of him still more when he left her a most liberal donation for her poor. Afraid of encountering Miss Stocks, he drove to the door of the hotel, paid his bill, claimed his luggage, and was on his way to Paris before that inquisitive person had realised that he had gone much in the fashion in which his wife had departed, "like two puffs of smoke." "Very remarkable people, very remarkable people! but well-matched on the whole, fitted to run in the same tram car," said Miss Lavinia Stocks.

Mr. Burlington hardly tarried anywhere. He hurried to London as if every second was of importance, and arrived there one fine morning early, to find every one asleep, no fires, and all the immense discomfort of an unexpected arrival, for which he had only his own impetuosity to thank.

CHAPTER XII.

WANTED, AN ADDRESS.

IT seemed a very simple thing to Mrs. Burlington to name her doctor, and ask for his address, till she found that five of the same name flourished in the directory without an "e" at the end of their names, and more than a dozen with an "e." Earl or Earle seemed no uncommon name. This was very perplexing! It was much more perplexing to see palpable hesitation in the face of the manager when she requested him to cash her cheque on a country bank. She had not a single shilling in change, and her bank book, her visiting cards,

every proof of her identity were most carefully locked up at home, or rather in Kensington, where she had left her desk and other belongings. Her trouble and her anxiety told against her in the manager's eyes. She had come downstairs dressed to go out, and she stood before him changing colour, and looking "odd" he thought to himself.

No one could blame him; she had next to no luggage, and no maid; and yet she represented herself as the wife of a well-known country gentleman of means. Appearances were against her, it must be allowed. As she stood there hesitating and more completely nonplussed than she had ever been in her life, the manager saying "I'll telegraph to the bank, and if it's all right the money will be given to you then," a very refined, gentle voice made itself heard. "Can I be of use to you? I can cash your cheque for you."

"Oh, thank you," said Mrs. Burlington, gratefully. Then, seeing a stranger, she added, "You do not

know me any more than this man does. I cannot allow you, a stranger, to do it for me. I can wait till an answer comes by telegraph."

"You need not wait."

The money was put into her hand, and the lady was hurrying away without the cheque till Mrs. Burlington went after her, and gave it to her.

"I am so very grateful to you," she said; "may I not know the name of one who has done me so great a kindness?"

The lady gave a reply so indistinct that Mrs. Burlington did not hear it; and, judging from her manner that she did not wish to be known, she was too well-bred to insist. Poor Mrs. Kingson in the meantime gained her own room, quite overpowered by the meeting and the nearness of the child she so passionately longed to declare herself to. Her maid was alarmed by her agitation and illness, but gave her the usual remedies with the deft fingers of those, who deprived of one or more

senses, possess redoubled faculties in other directions.

Mrs. Kingson rallied, but lay long in semi-darkness and quietness thinking with the overwhelming joy subdued by doubt of the accident which had brought her daughter within her reach. Suddenly a great dread came to her. What was she doing here apart from her husband? Why was she alone, and what was the difficulty with that cheque? Alarmed, filled with a vague fear that all her sacrifices had been in vain, she rose as soon as she was able, and asked for Mrs. Burlington.

She was directed along a passage close to her own room, and was shown into a small bedroom, looking very uncomfortable, and occupied evidently by one who was not accustomed to look after herself, and who was bewildered by finding herself in such a position. Looking among the general untidiness distinctly forlorn, Mrs. Burlington was standing with the overgrown directory on a small chest of drawers trying to make out the particular

Dr. Earle who had attended her in her illness. She turned round as Mrs. Kingson's dainty and graceful figure appeared at the door, and went with a smile towards her.

Mrs. Kingson commanded her voice, and said gently, "I came to ask you if you would come to my sitting-room. It is more comfortable than this;" and she looked round at her dreary room.

Something peculiar in the voice and accent struck Mrs. Burlington. She said impulsively, "You remind me of some one... I cannot tell who it is. Ah! It is the Mother Superior at the Convent at Angers!"

Mrs. Kingson made no reply. But she invited Maria by a gesture with a pretty mixture of entreaty and wilfulness to follow her to her sitting-room; and Mrs. Burlington obeyed her.

A sense of comfort after feeling so forlorn came to Maria. There was a pleasant cheerful fire burning; flowers—that look of being surrounded with

interests of some kind, which makes the difference as a rule between hotel life and any other, made the room comfortable.

Mrs. Kingson drew an arm-chair forward, and Mrs. Burlington sat down, and leaned back feeling all at once that she had been unutterably dreary, and that the dreariness had gone. She would not again ask her kind acquaintance her name, but she had a dreamy sense of somewhere long ago having heard this voice, and seen those eyes.

It was Mrs. Kingson who opened the conversation, if it can properly be called conversation, where one interrogates skilfully and draws answers from another almost against their knowledge, and certainly without their intention.

"You are worried just now," began Mrs. Kingson, "and you are not accustomed to act for yourself—to be by yourself. Can I help you? let me help you! How is it? Will you tell me what has happened?"

Her manner grew more eager, her words came more rapidly as she went on. Her anxiety was intense. Running through her mind was always this thought: If my life-long sacrifice has been in vain!

Maria had at first a natural disinclination to tell her difficulty to a stranger. She turned over in her own mind what she could say and what she could leave unsaid. If she left something unsaid, how was she to justify herself in relating her adventures, and she knew justification was necessary?

"You are thinking," said Mrs. Kingson, reading her hesitation aright in a manner startling to the younger woman—"you are thinking how much you will tell me—how much you will leave out. Well, I beg you will tell me nothing, nothing! I have no right to ask... But if I wanted to help, believe me it is not because I am curious or inquisitive that I also wanted to know. Without knowing your need, how can I help?"

A vibration of what appeared to Mrs. Burlington

wounded pride struck her painfully. This lady had trusted to her word. A stranger, she had solved a difficulty for her, and upon her side she had accepted her help.

"My need is so momentary that I feel ashamed of having been worried by it," she answered, with a nervous laugh; "and there is so much that is absurd and foolish in the whole story that I am ashamed of telling it to any one!" She laughed as she spoke, and her laugh this time was a spontaneous natural laugh that dispelled Mrs. Kingson's fears. No woman having done very wrong could laugh in that way.

"Ah!" she said, "your need must indeed be very transitory. It does me good to hear you laugh."

"I hardly know where to begin; but the end is so far that I have no notion where my husband is; and, though when the letter, I have sent him to be forwarded from home, does reach him it will be all right—at least I hope so!—I cannot send for him; I have no idea of his address in London."

"You do not know his address or where he is. You were then—parted?" Mrs. Kingson's tone was full of an implied rebuke as if she said, "and yet you can laugh!"

"It sounds very silly, but the truth is this," said Maria: "I heard something that fretted and disturbed me very much... I will tell you everything, and you can judge. I believe you will not judge me too hardly!"

"I was brought up believing myself an orphan. I was much made of, and all I said and did was seemingly right... I was told a man was passionately attached to me, and I married him. It is true I was talked into it. All indirectly. Though I did not deserve it, my husband is the kindest, the best... He is so indulgent and so good!.. I committed a thousand follies, and he forgave them! I spoiled his career. I made mischief between him and his best friend... You see, I believed in myself, and gave him credit for knowing nothing.

Two years had passed. Then I found that I was not an orphan—that my mother lived. At least, no one knew of her death.

“There was a story about her. I never believed it; but some people did. What affected me almost as much was the fact (and it was a fact!) that my husband had been tricked into marrying me, while I, on my side, had been influenced by the person who brought me up. In short, we had married without any real love on either side. It sounds dreary enough, does it not?” she said, turning to the motionless figure, who was screening her face from the fire and from her visitor’s observation.

“It does, indeed!”

“I could not bear the position of things! I wrote to my husband, who was away at the time. I still think he ought to have answered my letter—he never did!”

“Why?”

“I cannot say; it is so unlike him.”

"You are certain it reached him?"

"Quite certain."

"You sent it; posted it yourself?"

"I gave it to my uncle."

"And perhaps his wife—he has a wife? she may have kept it back."

"It is not likely," but as she spoke it flashed across her that no one could depend upon what Mrs. Kingson might or might not do. "My anxiety to know the truth about my mother pressed upon me terribly. I kept saying to myself, if she was good and innocent, it seemed strange her having left me to be brought up by others, and yet I never believed in her being anything but good!"

"You spoke?" she added, as the woman beside her made some inarticulate sound.

"I think it was nice of you, good of you, very good, to believe nothing against your mother. Apparently, circumstances looked unfavourable."

"It was not goodness," said Maria, frankly; "it

was not altogether goodness. I am somehow always inclined to believe in the opposition. I suppose I am contradictory."

"Ah, I see."

"Looking back, I see now that all these new ideas, this suddenly being thrust down from my pinnacle, upset my health, and I must have had fever when I left home. . . . I was very ill, and everything seems a dream to me now. I tried to find an old governess. I came away quite determined to know the truth. This governess was dead, and the comical part of my present position now comes in. I was so ill when I got into rooms in Kensington, so desperately ill and delirious, and so ill when my husband arrived, and I was moved to a house he took for me in Kensington, that I do not know the name of the street, or its number, and I think he is there. I am hunting up my doctor, because, of course, he will know, and that will save my waiting!" and her tone said how tired she was of waiting.

"It is a comical predicament; that is your word, is it not?"

"Yes. After my illness I left the house, taking a maid for the time with me. I did not care very much about her; but she was a good courier maid, and I went to France."

"I cannot think how in your state of health—you look so delicate—your husband allowed you to undertake a long journey by yourself!"

"Ah! you see, I never told him. I feel now how wrong I have been; but I made a vow that I never would see him till I could stand before him with my mother cleared; her name untarnished."

A suppressed sob broke from the listener beside her.

"You are surprised," asked Maria, astonished at the impression she was making on this stranger.

"I am—surprised," she answered in a low voice; "is there not something about leaving your parents and cleaving to your husband or wife?"

"Mine was not an ordinary case. But I am sorry

now, because writing would have done quite as well. I went to Angers to the convent there. I had a clue, and that was really the only way I learned anything. I saw the Mother Superior. I have been quite happy ever since. I can admire and love my mother now!"

"Though she acted very wrongly, foolishly, but she did not know, I suppose, then how wrong she was!"

"You must not blame her. My poor mother! When I find her I will try to make amends."

"And you have not found her?"

"I am no longer looking for her. My object now is to put my proofs into my husband's hands, and say to him, 'You cannot object now you know what she is. Find her out for me, and let us be happy together.'" She lowered her head, and went on, "When we once meet, my mother and I, can you imagine what it will be to me? Ah! to owe this happiness to my husband will be so much to

me; I see I have tired you with my long story, but I could not tell you one half, and leave the rest untold, because one part explains the whole."

She spoke to ears that heard her not. Mrs. Kingson had lost consciousness. To summon her maid, and try to help her, was Mrs. Burlington's first thought. But, as she could not speak to the dumb woman, and she appeared to be irritated by her presence, he was preparing to go when Mrs. Kingson recovered. "It is not your fault," she said gently, in an exhausted voice. "I often have these attacks. All will be well with you," she murmured, "and now I must rest. Will you . . . May I kiss you before you go—for your mother's sake." Surprised but touched at having interested a stranger so deeply, Maria stooped her face over that of the prostrate figure, and was startled by the fervent and passionate kisses given her. Then she went out of the room.

When she had gone Mrs. Kingson spoke rapidly

on her fingers to her maid, and sent a telegram off. She asked for her drops, and sank into a refreshing quiet slumber. Her face had changed. The sad and melancholy look had given way to a complete calm, a look as if a load had been lifted off her mind, and the curved lips were parted as if a long continued strain had been removed.

Mrs. Burlington was surprised to find that, in the interim, her room had been changed to one much nearer the strange lady whose name she did not know, and a sitting-room opened off it. She accepted the additional comfort gladly. "I suppose my respectability is vouched for by telegram," she said to herself.

There was nothing for it but to wait till her letter to her husband, addressed to Burlington, was forwarded to his proper address. She felt extremely lonely. She had no books and no work with her, her new friend was ill, and she could not disturb her. She felt very sorry for herself, and it

was a new experience to so brilliant a person to feel dull.

Through it all, however, came the felt relief about her mother, and her thankfulness made her tolerate the disagreeables of her situation more patiently than one could have imagined possible in one so impetuous and impulsive.

A knock at the door roused her from a perfect whirl of conflicting thoughts. Turning her head carelessly and expectantly to answer some question, probably about lights, she saw a tall figure come into the room and the door close behind him.

Springing to her feet, she faced him. He made a step forward, and Mrs. Burlington, who had so prided herself upon her brilliant manner of carrying everything through by herself, gave a cry of relief and satisfaction as she literally flung herself into her husband's arms, outstretched to receive her.

CHAPTER XIII.

TOGETHER AT LAST.

MRS. KINGSON had telegraphed to Mr. Burlington, having the address furnished by Mr. Wyncote of his house in Kensington. She would not make herself known to her daughter till her husband himself sanctioned the meeting. Mr. Wyncote had taken her good news, and the woman who had put herself upon one side for so many years was not going now to spoil her newly-offered happiness by precipitation. It was due to her child's husband that he should be the one to unite them, and she had been content to wait.

But to hear her child, her own darling, defending her had been almost too much for the poor lady. The drops given by her maid had produced a deep, dreamless slumber, and when Mrs. Burlington had gone to say good-bye before leaving the hotel with her husband she was obliged to write her a note, as the lady was still in a profound sleep, and, of course, no one wished to arouse her.

“Have you any idea who that lady was who has shown you so much kindness,” Cyril asked his wife as they were turning up the road that led to his house in Kensington.

“No, dear, not the least idea; and I hope you will not try to find out, because I think she wishes her name not to be known. I asked her at first, and she murmured something purposely very indistinct. I felt I could not press the question.”

Aunt Anne was ready with a kind welcome; but Maria saw that here she had lost ground to recover. The elderly lady, indeed, had a struggle with

herself not to show her annoyance. So much trouble! Such anxiety! So much running here and there, and so much discomfort. It was all very well for Cyril to wipe away all traces of resentment, and to welcome his wife as if all she had done had been done with his sanction.

She saw the foolish, impulsive self-will, and did not see as much as Cyril saw—the illness coming on, the harassed mind, the reaction, and all else. Of course, Aunt Anne was not in love; and Cyril was. For the first time in all his life he was really honestly in love, and with his own wife. It need not be taken as an encouragement to eccentric performances, but the fact remains. He was immensely absorbed now with the coming meeting, between the mother and daughter, and he worried poor Aunt Anne much by discussing the subject with her without ceasing when Maria, tired out by all the emotions of the day, had gone to lie down.

“You see, dear Aunt Anne, Maria is not very

strong, and Mrs. Kingson has heart complaint."

"Joy seldom hurts anyone, and of course it will be joy on both sides."

"It will be great joy."

"And when they have met, how is it to be?"

"How do you mean? What do you mean?" he asked, a little startled by her seriousness.

"Do not think I grudge those two this happiness; very far from it. It is right. But, Cyril, my dear, dear boy, once together, you will never be able to part them, and are you prepared to have a dancer—an uneducated person, however good—at Burlington, for all time?"

Cyril had not reflected on this side of the question, and the matter put before him in this light vexed him.

"She may be everything that is charming;" he exclaimed. "I cannot imagine Maria's mother anything else."

"But still you have never seen her. She may be

vulgar, and anything but a desirable inmate in your house."

"She may be; but it is against my convictions," he said slowly.

"And once at Burlington—your wife's mother—you cannot turn her out of your house. Once there she will be there always," insisted Miss Burlington, firmly. "Then there are the neighbours."

"Yes," he said slowly, "there are the neighbours. What do you yourself advise, Aunt Anne?" He spoke in a rather lowered voice, afraid of a breath coming to Maria's ears.

"Maria is softened. She is grateful for your
tion; thankful that you raise no obstacle to her reunion with her mother. I think I would, in your place from the first—just now when she is peculiarly amenable to reason—put the difficulties before her. The stand you take just now will affect all your life!"

"You put before me a course of action nothing

will tempt me to follow!" he said, vehemently. "No! My neighbours may act as they like, but I could no more spoil my wife's happiness than I can cut myself away from her society. Her mother may be a very vulgar woman—I do not believe it!—but whatever she is I shall leave things alone."

"Very well." Aunt Anne had great sinking of the heart. She could understand that a woman could be a dancer, and yet respectable. She had been prepared to receive her here where she herself was unknown; but she was not prepared to see her established in the beautiful old place, keeping all Cyril's friends and neighbours away from him if she was not presentable. She lay awake that night, tormenting herself, sadly conscious of an overpowering anxiety to see Mrs. Burlington's mother, and yet dreading the over-dressed figure she had conjured up, who would probably have a very loud voice and a confident manner. How many miserable moments we give ourselves about

things that either never come near us at all, or are recognised as blessings when they do come!

All the plans for telling Maria the simple fact that her mother was in London, that they would meet in a very few hours, were rejected by Mr. Burlington. He was over anxious about his wife's health, and yet all the preparation in the world would fail to be of any use. Directness is always so much the best thing, and anything else appeared theatrical to him.

In truth, he thought more of the mother than even of his wife, whose heart seemed to be in a perfectly healthy condition. But he said nothing till the next morning, wishing to spare her the looking forward which to an impatient temper is so trying.

Next morning, after breakfast, he asked her to come to his room; he wished to show her something.

She rose with alacrity. "I also have some things

to show you," she said, speaking with a certain excitement. "I have the records of my mother's life to show you. You are, I know, so just. You will not believe her guilty of any wrong, once you have read her story."

"It is not necessary for me to read them; nor, indeed, do I think there is time. I believe your mother blameless of all but one act of folly, for which she has inflicted on herself very terrible years of loneliness and sorrow."

"You believe in her—oh Cyril!" Maria was so astonished, so overjoyed, that she could say no more. She took her husband's hand between her own palms, and pressed it fervently.

"How good you are!" she said.

"No—just," he answered, with a little sigh. "Yes; I believe in your mother, and that is one reasons I have asked her to come to us to-day," he said, in a matter-of-fact tone, as if making a very ordinary announcement.

For a moment he was afraid he had done wrong. His wife grew deadly white, and then the bright carnation tints stole gradually back to lips and cheek.

“My mother?” she murmured.

“Yes; she is no stranger to you, dear. Did not instinct speak at all when you met her at the hotel?”

“My mother!” repeated Maria, with moistened eyes. “Did she know me?”

“At once.”

“Then why did she let me treat her as a stranger? Why”

A thousand queries came to her lips, but she was so bewildered and astonished by the unexpected news that she could hardly speak.

Her husband was relieved to find how much control she had over herself.

“Your mother is very thoughtful and very good to us,” he said, purposely trying to lead her thoughts to the present and the future. “She wishes the

meeting, the reunion, which, poor soul, she has pined for so long, to come as from me. She had misgivings and fears—very groundless fears once I knew the outline of her story—that our happiness might be marred unless I myself sanctioned the meeting. You can believe how thankful I am you should have this happiness. I know how often the question has disturbed you—and no wonder!”

His wife’s eyes were brimming, but she kept back her tears.

“I have never seen your mother, dearest, but I quite understand that this tie once knitted again cannot be broken.”

“And you have never seen her,” said Maria, in a low voice. She understood all his words implied, and that, had her mother been far from the gentle, unassuming woman she was, he was ready to accept her for her sake. She leaned her cheek against his big brown hand. “Thank you. You are good and kind,” she said, softly.

Then her husband warned her about her mother's health; for he knew that in telling her he was wisely giving her a motive that would more than anything else enable her to subdue any violent emotion.

While they talked together Mrs. Kingson arrived. Instead of the overdressed and confident figure Aunt Anne had expected, instead of the loud-voiced and somewhat underbred person Mr. Burlington had dreaded, there came towards them a lady delicately formed, unspeakably graceful in manner, with a sweet, low-toned voice, and almost a timid and beseeching expression. Mr. Burlington greeted her warmly, and so did Aunt Anne.

Mrs. Kingson looked around her. "My child?" she asked, in a still lower voice.

"Maria is here," answered Mr. Burlington; and as he spoke he led her to the library door, opened it, and shut it after her again, and left the two alone and together.

"My dear Cyril!" said Aunt Anne, "I am so

thankful, so relieved! How could I make myself so utterly miserable? Maria's mother is——"

"Maria's mother," answered Mr. Burlington, anxious not to betray even to Aunt Anne what his own preconceived notions had been.

Then they looked at each other and laughed. How unutterably foolish they had been!

Aunt Anne was the first to recover.

"I retract everything I ever said about her, my dear Cyril!"

Cyril did not answer. But his satisfaction was certainly not less than hers.

CHAPTER XIV.

WAS IT THE LAST OF FLORA HARRINGTON?

MRS. BURLINGTON had one great disappointment in store, and once again Aunt Anne was led to understand how much unnecessary misery she had made for herself.

Mrs. Kingson would not go to Burlington Manor and make one of the family party. She had a great many reasons against acquiescing in such an arrangement, and Mr. Burlington was obliged to own that from her point of view she was right.

"Make as much of me as you like," she said, frankly, to her son-in-law, "it is due to your wife that the world should know I am not a mother she

need be ashamed of; but after this fact is established, there are those two things in my career I so bitterly regret now. I cannot myself get over these terrible mistakes. People may be kind, but you cannot expect them to get over them any more than I can. I have my pretty home. I have my child's society. I accept from you, as her most kind husband, luxuries I never dreamed of, and every possible comfort. I am quite the happiest woman in the world now! Leave me my independent life, and come often to see me—the oftener the better. Believe me, it is so best.”

Maria, who had drawn a picture in her own mind of her mother's perpetual companionship, was bitterly disappointed.

“Ah, child,” said Mrs. Kingson, “you see only a little way into the future. To the older and more experienced woman a longer peep is given. Why should you depend upon my companionship? You have all your life done well without it.”

"That is why I want it now, mother, I have years and years of loss to make up for."

"And the companionship of your husband? Supposing you and I were living under the same roof, my darling, your anxiety to 'make up' would bring you from his side to mine. You owe him much!"

"I love him dearly! Oh! mother, when one loves, gratitude seems a cold word!"

"In one sense. You are happy, darling, and it sometimes frightens me when I think of all the risks you ran. You might have lost his affection instead of winning it."

"I also think that sometimes."

"Then, also, never forget this: a woman owes it to herself—to society—not to put herself into any position which is not forced upon her. There is much more meaning than young people ever seem to think in these days—to 'do your duty in that state of life unto which it pleases God to call you.' Would I had thought this long ago."

"But when a high motive urges one on."

"Ah, my child, the end never justifies the means when the means are wrong. You must not depend on sophistry when you wish to argue with a woman who has proved those very arguments to be wrong!"

"But you helped your mother—your father...."

"Darling, I might have done other things; I loved the applause, the success.... I might have had patience. The young do not look forward enough. They never see the consequences of their actions..... If they only did.... By my own folly I lost my position. Then, to get rid of my wretchedness, I simulated a crime I would have died rather than commit. Now I have to suffer for it. Please God, you do not suffer! For myself," she added, folding her hands together, "I acknowledge that my past suffering is just. I have deserved it!"

Against this reasoning Maria had nothing to

oppose save affectionate entreaty. It was by Mr. Burlington's own wish that Mrs. Kingson travelled with them. She was much fatigued, and drove straight from the railway station home with her maid. As Maria and her husband drove through the park, she could not help contrasting her emotions now with her self-complacency on her arrival, and as with a full heart she was thinking with intense thankfulness of the richness come into her life, her mother's words, "what she had risked," came to her, and, with an involuntary movement, she laid her hand on her husband's. He understood her now, and sympathised so entirely with her!

The light lay softly upon the tree tops, and sparkled on the windows.

"It is like an illumination," said Mr. Burlington.

"It is all so beautiful, and it is home," said his wife softly.

Mrs. Butt and her troop of servants stood in the hall to receive them; and there was no feigned

joy on her face. If she imperfectly understood all that had happened, it was an immense satisfaction that any gossip or ill-natured comments on the prolonged absence of the family, and those expressions of surprise at so sudden a departure of the mistress of the household could be put an end to. No class feels more deeply a slur on the family than that of old servants bound to it by ties of sincere attachment, and deriving their own status from its unassailable position.

It seemed to Maria as if everything reminded her of some stupid speech, something she had said that might have been left unsaid. Aunt Anne had gone to her own house, happier than she had yet been since the morning she so well remembered, when she had been troubled by Cyril's letter announcing his engagement. Husband and wife were in the dining-room together. The servants had left the room, and Maria, laughing, looked meaningly at the pictures. Cyril followed her gaze,

and in his turned laughed. "You still challenge their originality?" he asked gaily. "I do not, for some reason or another, care half so much about it now."

"I challenge nothing. If you told me you had painted them yourself, and painted them with your elbow, I should believe you!"

"I am not sure that that is a great compliment to the paintings."

"I was not thinking of them at all. I mean that I feel as if I could never contradict you again. I am quite afraid of the state of my mind. I am sure that it cannot last. I feel so much too good!"

"I do trust that you will occasionally contradict me, otherwise our lives may be too monotonous."

"Seriously speaking, Cyril, what I want most to know is, what can we do about my mother. That is the first most pressing question. Oh, we must put her right in everyone's eyes!"

"Believe me, dear, leave it to time. You cannot force people to believe what you want them to believe."

"Waiting seems hard, and she has been so wronged. My poor mother!"

"Waiting does seem hard; but you must allow people to find out for themselves what your mother is; no words of yours, none of mine—nothing we can say will have the effect that she herself will have when her character, her manner, all else that is admirable about her become known?"

"But if my mother will go nowhere, if she will see no one, how are people to know?"

"In the first place we will persuade her to come to us when one or two influential people are here. It is wonderful how soon truth spreads, especially when it is the object of no one to conceal it."

Maria felt that she could say no more.

Mr. Burlington himself was both willing and anxious to put this matter as far right as possible;

but he knew only too well that the very people whom his wife wished to conciliate and convince were those who must be left to arrive at conclusions by themselves, and that any attempt to argue or convince would result in nothing. They were essentially the people who, "convinced against their will," would remain "of the same opinion still." In the meantime in the neighbourhood there was some excitement. Kindly expressions were heard from those who had the rule of kindness; ill-natured speeches from those carping, disagreeable people who are very ill-natured about everything. Every one was a little anxious to know whether Mrs. Burlington's mother would "show," or whether she would shun people.

The Duchess lost no time in going over to luncheon, and it was known that she had done so, and after this visit the neighbourhood went also, with one exception—Mrs. Adleybourne. So little did Maria notice her defection that when one lady,

a little anxious to slip in a small sting, asked point blank whether she had been there, Mrs. Burlington's answer, given with quiet sincerity, defeated the little bit of ill-nature. "I do not quite remember. So many people have been here. If Mrs. Adleybourne has not been of the number she is perhaps absent."

"Oh! she is at home. She had quite a large party only last week."

"Then, as no one can be in two places at once, one could not expect her to be here and at home with her own visitors." This was spoken with so much open good temper, that nothing more could be said.

Indeed, Maria now was in every way one who had gained much and lost nothing in the battle of life, unlike most people. In former days she had asserted herself unduly, all unconscious that, her position being undefined, it had in reality forced her into self-assertion. Now, with her mind at rest, an attachment to her husband which sprang from the full knowledge of his generosity and goodness

towards her, the sense of rest and freedom from all anxiety connected with her mother gave her spirits—always elastic—a fillip and yet a softening touch.

Prosperity, like adversity, never works in a half-hearted way upon anyone. It either softens, or it hardens a character. In Mrs. Burlington's case it softened her as adversity never would have done. While anxious to do nothing to which her husband could take exception, Maria would not have been herself if she had not longed to put right any wrong she had in her ignorance and carelessness done her husband.

Her ambitious aims were for him now. Any plans she made were for his benefit, and not her own; and the effect of knowing her mother's story was to check undue anxiety about being herself a prominent figure anywhere. That central position which she had at one time coveted had melted long ago it seemed to her, and sometimes with a laugh in which lay a certain shame, she would tell her

mother of her first and earliest ambitions. Aunt Anne was often at the cottage with Mrs. Kingson, but no one enjoyed her society more than Mr. Burlington.

He learned a great deal books never would have taught him—never had taught him. All the solitary years, all her crushing sorrows, had not deprived Mrs. Kingson of the wonderful charm and fascination which appeared now that happiness played around her once more. Her daughter had inherited much of her beauty, much of her brilliancy and charm, but it is doubtful whether she could ever have sacrificed herself, put herself entirely upon one side as Mrs. Kingson had done. Then one day, by one of those accidents of speech that the most guarded people sometimes fall into, Maria made another discovery.

Her uncle's wife--whom to forgive she still found so difficult!--had seen and spoken to her mother, not once but often. She could have told a great deal, for the mother had allowed her to know where

she was, and who she was, and had made once or twice a humble petition, which the other lady had refused. She had wished once or twice to see and have speech with her child, promising to remain unknown. And Mrs. Kingson had refused, and also had promised—and not kept her word—to put the case to her husband, thus putting the onus of the refusal upon him.

“And you think I should forgive this, also?” exclaimed Mrs. Burlington, with natural indignation. “Mother, you are almost a saint, but can you say you forgive this?”

“My dearest child, when the heart is overflowing with happiness there is no room for even remembering these things!” said Mrs. Kingson, tenderly. “Perhaps she was right. No one can be expected to act against their convictions.”

Mr. Burlington was surprised late one afternoon to find his wife sitting in his study, evidently disturbed and annoyed about something.

"I thought you never, never, never were coming," she said, lifting her flushed face to his, "and my courage has been oozing away every moment."

"Your courage? What is it all about, darling?"

"I wonder whether my stupidity in the past is to affect my happiness all my life," she said, vehemently.

He sat down, and leaned forward. "Now tell me," he said, wondering what new phase they were entering upon.

"It is a long story. It is partly about Flora Harrington—partly about young Mr. Wyncote. Oh, if you knew how I hate telling you of my folly, of my self-will, of my blindness!"

She stopped to recover herself, and then went on in a lower voice, holding herself more in restraint.

"To begin with, there is Flora's letter. It is hateful. But I want you to read it, and to advise me." She held out several sheets of very thin letter paper, covered with Miss Harrington's scrawling bold handwriting:—

"MY DEAR MOLLY,—I'm in a terrible mess, out of which you must please get me as soon as possible. My young man threatens to break off everything because some stupid meddling idiot has told him I carried on with Mr. W., and took him flowers daily, etc. Please write by return a letter I can show him, saying that the flowers were from you. This will put all right. Of course, I know they were not; but stretch a point for me, and I'll be grateful all my days.—Your loving

FLORA."

Mr. Burlington read it, and returned it with a look of great contempt.

"Advise me!" pleaded Maria, earnestly.

"How can I, darling? I am no dispassionate person."

"It is everything for Flora, I suppose, to carry out her marriage. How can I deliberately say what is not true? That is impossible!"

"I know it is for you," her husband said, in a voice of feeling.

"Is it possible that I ever called this girl my friend!"

"It always seemed strange to me. But very young girls do not look deeply into the origin of their friendship."

"I remember thinking her very goodhearted and very amusing. Now I see vulgarity and utter selfishness, and yet, if I could, I would help her!"

Mr. Burlington could offer no suggestion. He sometimes felt surprised at his wife's absolute unconsciousness. She was utterly ignorant of the real state of the case that, to ingratiate herself with Mr. Wyncote, Flora had tried to make him believe that Mrs. Burlington was not indifferent to his attractions. For he had seen at once what was meant, and, while he knew his wife to be absolutely innocent of Flora's machinations, her very innocence puzzled him. As something of the kind passed again through his mind, Maria suddenly started to her feet, and her face flushed deeply.

"Ah," she said "I never thought of it before in this way! But do you think it possible that Flora tried to make Mr. Wyncote look at things—made him believe that those flowers were from me?" She looked so ashamed and so distressed that her husband hastened to calm her.

"Dearest, he knew better; and," he added, in a lower voice, "I knew better. Never mind what she tried to do; no one respects you more, no one does you fuller justice than Wyncote. I may also tell you that his interpretation was, that you were longing for some definite news of your mother, and that any kindness shown him was only to be handed on to her. He was puzzled, and very naturally, and you must dismiss it all from your mind now."

"I will, when I have written to Flora."

She sat down and contemplated her note-paper, and was fairly at a standstill.

So much hung, apparently, upon her answer, and yet. . . .

At that moment a frantic peal sounded; the front doorbell rang as it had seldom rung; there was a bustle, a loud exclamation, and Miss Flora Harrington (her figure tremendously accentuated by a tight-fitting gown more aggressively tight than ever) rushed into the room.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MEETING OF OLD FRIENDS.

THE surprise and, it may be added, the consternation in Mrs. Burlington's face were something to see. Mr. Burlington in after days used to depict them for her benefit. She was so completely astounded at being taken by storm by the girl who had behaved so badly to her that she could only say, "Flora!"

"Well!" said Flora, reddening. "It is Flora, but is that all you have got to say to me—not a single civil word?"

"I fail to see how you can expect a civil word," said Maria, resentfully. "Is it possible that you do not

feel any compunction for all the mischief you made?"

"Compunction! Well, I do think that is one way of putting it! You ought, on the contrary, to feel grateful to me all your life! But for my having had the courage to bring things to a crisis, you would never have found your mother, cleared up everything, and made peace with your husband!"

Want of breath stopped her, and only that. Maria flushed red and turned pale alternately.

Mr. Burlington looked on with great amusement, because Flora, as she now posed, was precisely what he always conceived her to be—impudent! She was more than that. Then he saw that his wife was deeply annoyed, and he rose and went over to her. "You are hardly strong enough for any scenes, dear," he said, in his low complacent voice. "Will you leave Miss Harrington to me, and I can hear from her what brought her here—what she wishes you to do for her."

"Oh, as far as that goes, and as Molly has

changed so much, and you seem now to possess her confidence, let me say at once—nothing!” answered Flora briskly, “unless she will condescend to order me a cup of tea. Thanks,” as Mr. Burlington rang and gave the order. “Now, I expect a visitor. I have asked Wyncote, junior, to meet me here. Don’t faint in coils all round, but I telegraphed, told him it was important, and asked him to¹ come and see me here. You see with a frantically jealous young man in one direction, I could not go there,” and Flora stripped off her long gloves, pulled off her hat, patted her fluffy head with the gesture Maria remembered so well, and looked as much at home as if she was there as the cherished guest of the master and mistress of the house.

From under her drooping lids, however, she watched to see whether her announcement had any effect upon the two on whom she had descended like an avalanche. Much to her surprise, and certainly to her discomfiture, they both looked relieved.

Mr. Burlington said instantly, "That is, of course, the best plan. You must understand, Miss Harrington that I refuse to allow my wife to mix herself up in this affair in any way, and it is most unfair of you to expect it."

"All right," laughed Flora, maliciously. "Not very long ago your saying so would have been the best way of feeling sure that she would do it!"

Maria, afraid of losing all self-control over herself, rose abruptly, and left the room, and her husband followed her.

Flora looked after them with a curious expression—a feeling almost of envy at the perfect understanding they seemed to have arrived at, an anxiety about her own future apparently so insecure at present, and regret at having forfeited a very useful friendship, were all in turn weighing upon her. She drank her tea when it came, and had begun her second cup when Mr. Wyncote was shown into the room.

Flora welcomed him with great satisfaction, offered him tea, and was so completely disembarrassed and at her ease, that he wondered whether he had understood her telegram correctly.

"Well," she said, laughing, "here I am and there you are!"

"I am here, certainly," he said gravely. "May I know? . . ."

"You may know nothing if you begin to speak in that funereal tone. I want you to do me a service; nothing deadly. You need not look so alarmed!"

But, though she spoke with a good deal of bravado, she was much daunted by Mr. Wyncote's grave, disapproving look. Nothing ever daunted Flora like what she called want of appreciation. She had a supreme belief in her own power of charming all mankind, and she was always immensely disconcerted when she discovered that her powers were limited—that certain people were impervious to her methods of fascination.

“Will you be so good as to say in what way I can be useful to you? As a friend of Mrs. Burlington’s—for whom I have the very greatest respect—I shall be glad to serve you,” said the young man, gravely.

Then Flora found her request more difficult, and it was a moment or two before she could find courage to plunge into it all. “Some one,” she said at length, trying to throw off the constraint his manner imposed upon her—“some one has tried to make mischief between the man I am going to marry and myself, and said—told him that I had had a hot flirtation with you! I want you to corroborate my assertion, and say it was not me at all. I was the go-between, and it was somebody else!”

In a moment Mr. Wyncote saw what she wanted, and a feeling of disgust rose in his mind towards her. How hard she had tried to let him believe that Mrs. Burlington was “interested” in him. Just at first he had had a sentimental feeling for a

wife unappreciated by all accounts. How soon he had lost that feeling he knew. No man worth anything could blind himself to the fact of Mrs. Burlington's supreme indifference. Puzzled at first, he had afterwards thought that she guessed something of the friendship existing between his father and Maria's mother, whom he himself hardly ever saw, and at whose house he used to deposit the violets and other things, conceiving that if they came from Mrs. Burlington they must be meant for her.

"Well, Miss Harrington, I am quite ready to swear, if necessary, that no flirtation existed at any time between us."

"There are the flowers to be accounted for. That is a very important point."

"Do you mean that the fact of your giving flowers from some one else, for somebody else, is likely to lead you into tribulation?"

His mocking tone irritated Flora Harrington.

"I want you to say distinctly that I..."

"That you never made love to me?" he said, teasingly. The comical side of it struck him now, and he had some difficulty in restraining his laughter. He saw her wince, and he recovered his former polite tone of indifference.

"I will write with pleasure anything absolutely true," he said. "Will this do?"

He sat down, and wrote without farther words—

"DEAR MISS HARRINGTON,—As you wish me to assure you of what we both know, I beg to say that you never at any time were the object of any attentions on my part, that I never was an admirer of yours, and that nothing ever passed between us, save those courtesies common to all indifferent acquaintances. I remain, truly yours,

"HORACE WYNCOTE."

Flora took the note, and read it.

She was mortified and angry. What had she expected?

When she raised her head again, she was alone.

She rose, and drew a long breath. Those words would do; they were brutally true, but, after all, they would serve her turn—only . . . she had had a sort of faint hope that she might have drawn something more complimentary from the man she herself admired so much. She was putting on her long gloves when the door opened, and Mr. Burlington came in.

“Miss Harrington,” he said, in a kind tone, “my wife is distressed that you should hurry away so fast; she feels it inhospitable. I have come to say we both hope you will stay over the night here.”

“Thank you,” said Flora, a little touched by consideration she had not deserved; and then, her vanity suggesting a different reason, she said very archly. “You are quite, quite sure that your wife approves of your suggestion?”

“Quite sure, as the suggestion came from her. I am ashamed to say that it did not occur to me.”

"All right," said Flora. "I am glad to stop, as I have had a cross-country journey, and I am dreadfully tired."

Mr. Burlington left her, and was amused to find that as she had brought luggage and dismissed the railway cab, the invitation had been in a measure counted upon as pretty sure to be given.

That evening Flora tried her best to re-establish relations on the old footing with Mrs. Burlington; and Maria learned how difficult it was once a woman had been unguardedly open about her relations with her husband to draw back into an attitude of reserve, with a girl who had neither tact nor delicacy, and who refused to see how everything was changed.

She persisted in reminding Mrs. Burlington of little speeches, arguments, and other things about indifference towards her husband, and the wife who imagined that she had been reticent, and had never betrayed how little love had had to do with her marriage, had to bear, with ill-concealed impatience

at first, and open annoyance afterwards, a repetition of silly speeches and hasty words she had herself forgotten. There were several moments that evening when she fondly trusted that she would never in all her life see Flora Harrington again.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MEANING OF THE WORD "THANKFULNESS."

MR. BURLINGTON was a man who, in his own quiet way, never lost sight of an object. To his wife's more impatient spirit the time seemed long as each day passed, and she seemed no nearer than before to that one barrier between her and perfect happiness—the clearing of her mother's name. It was that mother who now preached patience. Indeed, to one who had herself been so long patient, nothing now seemed really long. Everyone knew now that Mrs. Burlington's mother was in the neighbourhood and often with her, and everyone wished to see her

and to judge for themselves what her position in society had been.

"You see," as Mrs. Hutchinson remarked, "it is not so much what she is now, because Mr. Burlington or his wife may have coached her, and she may be quite presentable, poor thing! Still a doubtful *pas* shows itself, and I shall feel really sorry for that poor Mr. Burlington, and his wife, of course, also, if the poor woman shows too plainly what her origin and antecedents have been."

"And we are certain to notice them," said Mrs. Adleybourne, with severity. "I for one have a sort of instinct about them; something—an innate something always tells me these things."

"But do you suppose that we shall be asked to meet her?" asked Mrs. Hutchinson.

"Of course not; certainly not; but she is always there. By accident one might see her, and it would be so awkward."

"So very awkward. Supposing she was intro-

duced?" and Mrs. Hutchinson looked like some one who had received a shock of some kind.

It was a very still, clear, lovely autumnal day not long after this; and Mrs. Adleybourne was anxious to break the ice, and call at Burlington; but she had postponed her visit so long that she felt it a little difficult. Mrs. Hutchinson was tying her bonnet strings, and full of a proposed visit in the same direction, when she saw Mrs. Adleybourne driving up to her door. Mrs. Adleybourne's daughters were not present; but she had her only son with her. He was her youngest child, had inherited more than his mother's good looks, and was the apple of her eye and her darling.

To speak the truth, he was, considering the way he was brought up—idolised and petted—singularly unspoiled. He had one of those naturally fine dispositions that set at naught all the proverbs about over-indulgence. His beauty was undeniable. He had those large dark eyes that look out into the

world very frankly and honestly, a clear dark complexion with a fine healthy glow, and was tall, well-made, elastic, and full of all the natural activity of a healthy boy of his age—ten.

People used to say he was his father over again, but to Mrs. Adleybourne he was simply himself; and he was certainly not like his father, either in appearance or manner,—a boy whose sunny expression and cheery manner made friends everywhere, whereas his father had been a somewhat ponderous man, whose health was too bad to admit of much cheerfulness, and who had never had the talent of making friends. Charley Adleybourne had been taken to-day by his mother, because she especially wished to mark her feeling about Mrs. Burlington's mother, and she intended to say something—if she could do so—about not having brought her daughters.

Mrs. Hutchinson hastened down to receive her, and soon found that the visit was not wholly complimentary or disinterested.

"I want you to come with me, Mrs. Hutchinson," said Mrs. Adleybourne, with an attempt at carelessness, thinking that she was not betraying her anxiety.

"It would be a good opportunity, certainly. The Duchess has just passed," answered Mrs. Hutchinson, fully aware of all that meant.

"Yes; under her wing as it were, the county could take no exception to the presence of that person, or rather to my meeting that person. When it was known that the Duchess was present, I should not mind." She spoke as if each of her actions was of immense importance, which was, indeed, what she believed herself.

"Now you see why I want you to come."

"Yes, I see," said Mrs. Hutchinson. "Well, I do not mind going again, though I was there lately."

"And did you see the—creature?"

"No; I saw no one but the Burlingtons."

"Mrs. Burlington subdued, I suppose?"

"I certainly did not think so."

"How extraordinary!"

"Some people never take a lesson. I expected to find her a little less aggressive; not quite as pleased with herself. She was just the same; only I think she was more careful not to say startling things."

"Ah, depend upon it, her manner, if it remains the same, is only put on to hide her real feelings. Let us go."

The two ladies went, and drove up the avenue through the fine park, too much absorbed by their anticipations to notice the splendid autumnal dress of the horse chestnut trees, or the soft beauty of the maples in their gold and crimson dresses. When they arrived Mrs. Burlington was talking to an elderly lady, and the Duchess was not anywhere in sight.

Mrs. Burlington received them with the same brilliant smile as of old. She did not name her

visitor, and Mrs. Adleybourne at once conjectured it was the mother. This was terrible without the Duchess! The lady, after a moment or two, made a well-bred attempt to enter into conversation with the new comers, and was met by singular silence, and a look of great astonishment. Mrs. Adleybourne was so irritated at her venturing to address her that she was simply as rude as she dared to be under Mrs. Burlington's eyes. That lady instantly hurried forward and conveyed the stranger away from her with marked respect. Evidently "the creature," thought Mrs. Adleybourne.

Then one of the few people present ventured to ask Mrs. Burlington whether the Duchess had called.

"Yes, she came here for a moment on her way to see my mother," answered Mrs. Burlington, with very real unconsciousness. She did not in the least know that her words were of any importance, or that there was a sort of quiver of anxiety in the minds of two or three present.

Mrs. Adleybourne heard, and felt a little sorry, not that she had been rude, but that she had been rude to the wrong person. Then Mrs. Hutchinson came up to her in a state of excitement. "Have you heard? Do you know that Lady Dorothy Saville is here?"

"No! How I should like to make her acquaintance! Such a celebrated woman. It is really very interesting. I daresay she is with the Duchess."

At that moment her Grace appeared, accompanied by a dark-eyed, graceful figure draped in black lace, with hair which was snowy white, and sparkling, wonderful, beautiful eyes.

Before Mrs. Adleybourne had time to cross the lawn and pay her respects, her little boy had run up to the two ladies. He was always delighted to have a few kind words from her Grace, who was fond of children. He stood beside her, and his bright, beaming face won the heart of her companion. She stooped and kissed him. Mrs. Adleybourne

was immensely pleased. She was overjoyed that so spontaneous a mark of favour should be given to her idol in the sight of all the world by so great a lady. As soon as she could, she went up to the Duchess and paid her respects in her most genial manner. Then with a slight hesitation she looked at the white-haired and lovely woman beside her, and said, "As your friend so kindly noticed my boy, I hope you will be so very good as to present me to her also."

The Duchess was pleased. She never for a moment imagined that Mrs. Adleybourne did not know who this was, and she thought merely the two happened not to have met before.

Turning to her friend, she said, "Dear Mrs. Kingson, Mrs. Adleybourne wishes to be made known to you."

Mrs. Adleybourne nearly had a fit! She hardly heard Mrs. Kingson's gentle voice. "A friend of my daughter?"

She lost her presence of mind, and after gazing at the figure before her for one awkward moment she turned and fled! A little later on, as she was trying to find her little boy and go away, she was much amazed to find him close to Mrs. Kingson, who was explaining in a pretty, fanciful way the meaning of some flowers she held on her lap. Never had the boy been so called by his idolising mother. Her voice rang out so sharply that he positively started. Without saying "farewell" to any one, save a very frigid "good-bye" to her hostess, Mrs. Adleybourne departed, basely deserted by Mrs. Hutchinson, who, as she would have expressed it, under the Duchess's wing, ventured not only to make the acquaintance of, but also to be very civil to Mrs. Kingson.

Maria noted it all with acute annoyance. She felt it more than her mother did. There comes a time in life when these things cease to wound, or even to surprise. Mrs. Kingson had gone through

so much that the rudeness of a woman like Mrs. Adleybourne had no power to vex her, and she did not realise how intensely her daughter felt it.

Maria paced her room that night in a fever of indignation. She did not put her prayer into words, but had she done so it would have been to the effect that, if this matter could be put right, she would accept trial in any other shape. Mr. Burlington, who had noticed that his wife was disturbed, went to find her, hoping to be able to soothe her and to get her to look at the brighter side of the picture.

"You do not know what it is!" she said, sobbing; "it does seem so hard, so cruelly hard."

"I can feel your sorrow, my darling, but you frighten me; you will make yourself ill again, and what is the good of making yourself so wretched?"

"Any other trial, anything to right her in the eyes of the world!" she exclaimed vehemently.

Any other trial. How in the near future these

words came back to her with the saddest significance!

Time went on. The autumn became winter, and while the snow still lay on the ground, the joybells rang from the neighbouring churches, and a son and heir was born, to the delight of all who wished well to the Burlingtons. Aunt Anne and Mrs. Kingson were equally charmed, and Mrs. Burlington's cup of happiness was full to overflowing. She watched her mother with the baby in her arms, and saw the happiness all round her, and felt as if the meaning of "thankfulness" had never come home to her before.

CHAPTER XVII.

ABOUT A CERTAIN LUNATIC.

THE Beryls had most sincerely rejoiced in Mr. Burlington's renewed happiness, being much more interested, as a matter of course, in Mr. Burlington than in his wife.

No after explanations, perhaps, ever entirely obliterated one very great mistake. There is always that unpleasant sense of having misjudged or of being misjudged, and when any episode in the past has to be avoided there is very naturally a constraint which must always be a bar to complete intimacy or friendship.

But the situation with regard to those painful family matters remained unchanged with the Beryls. Mrs. Beryl was hopelessly insane, and the one comfort was that she was always very gentle and never violent.

But as her insanity took the form of melancholia it was inexpressibly saddening for her husband to see her. She never recognized him, and sat perpetually muttering "Lost! lost! lost!" her eyes fixed on vacancy, taking small notice of her attendants or of any one.

About this time Marcia Dorington came to the conclusion that she ought to do something with her life. Her position was different from that of many girls. She had no parents living, no very near relations, and she always thought the luxurious life she led was not the right life for herself. She was enthusiastic, energetic, and possessed of many gifts. She turned over very often in her own mind what she could do, since her taking up any work did

not mean neglecting home duties she had not got to perform. What people carelessly call chance determined her, and sent her into a groove from which, had it been proposed to her some time before, she would have shrunk back.

It so happened that, walking by herself one day, she passed a cottage from which piercing shrieks issued. Afraid that some one was being hurt, or that help in some way was needed, she hurried to the door, and knocked. She heard the shrieks continuing, and a plaintive voice trying to soothe some one.

As she stood there the bright winter sun lighting up her hair, and touching a large white boa she was wearing, the cottage door was thrown violently open, and a pale and frightened young woman rushed out, followed by an elderly woman with dishevelled hair, and the expression of a perfect fiend. Inwardly much terrified, Marcia had the presence of mind to remain absolutely still. Much to her

surprise, the poor mad woman began curtsying to her. "The angel," she muttered, "the angel!"

She covered her face with her hand, and went back into the cottage.

"She has never been as bad as this," said the daughter. "I thought she would have killed me. I must go and get the doctor."

"Are you not afraid of leaving her alone?" asked Marcia.

"I cannot help it. I would be too frightened to stay another night with her," answered the daughter, who was, indeed, still trembling with the fright she had received.

Marcia was not sure whether she herself was afraid or not, but an impulse made her say, "I will stay with her, if you will not be very long."

Hardly waiting to offer her thanks, the woman hurried away, and Marcia then realised that she had deliberately promised what she might find it difficult to perform.

However, she went in, resolved to do her best. The woman, who was muttering to herself and pacing up and down like a caged animal, stopped short, and began once more to make those curtsies which so embarrassed her. She was evidently ripe for mischief, and very restless, only restrained by something in the presence of Marcia, a new influence she was not accustomed to. Every now and then she said, "Oh, those angry, angry voices. Nothing drives them away. They are always there, plotting and planning against me."

Marcia had no experience, and the woman's gestures got more and more violent every moment. Then—she never could account for it to herself satisfactorily—she began to sing. She had a very soft pleasant voice of great power, but penetrating, and very sweet. Her voice trembled a little at first, but she rallied all her courage, and soon found no courage necessary.

The unfortunate woman dropped into a chair, and

gazed at her visitor spellbound. As she listened, the terrible look of fury left her face, her features calmed, great tears welled in her eyes and rolled unheeded over her face, and she sat quiet, sobbing like a little child. Marcia went on singing, and when the doctor arrived he found her standing against the room door, and saw the extraordinary influence she exercised over the woman he had been attending some time, whose outburst he had feared, and whose removal he had been trying to arrange. Marcia knew Dr. Howe a little, but he had never heard her sing before.

Mrs. Cole, the poor mad woman, was subdued and quiet enough now; she was exhausted—partly by her violence, partly from crying; and the doctor and his assistant had no trouble in removing her.

The adventure did not dwell long in Marcia's mind, and in a few days she had forgotten it. She was, therefore, surprised one day to receive a letter from Dr. Howe. He said that he was going to

ask a great favour—he was going to make a very earnest request. He was convinced that she was one of the people who, most of all others—above all others—had an extraordinary influence for good on the insane, and he entreated her to come to his asylum and try the effect of her voice on some of the unhappy inmates, when she possibly could do so. Much as Marcia shrank from this idea, it seemed to her—if her voice really helped to soothe and comfort these poor afflicted beings—that it would be wrong to shut herself out of a direct means of doing good in that direction.

She thought it over very carefully, for if she began, if she once undertook this thing, she must carry it on.

She agreed to go, and, after the first two or three times, began to lose every fear, and to like watching the effect of her singing on the poor vacant faces. There were very few. There were two separate buildings, in one of which were three

ladies; in the other about six poor women for whom some charitable people paid. One of the ladies from the first took an almost inconvenient affection for Marcia, and she was so lovely, so interesting in appearance, and had such refined gestures, so sweet and gracious a manner, that it was difficult to realize that she was insane. But there was a terribly hopeless look in her eyes, and every now and then she wrung her hands together, saying, in a tone of despair, "Lost! lost! lost!" No names were mentioned. Marcia was full of the deepest compassion for this poor thing in particular. Never had her voice sounded more sweet, never had she thrown more of herself into her singing, than when, alone with this lady in her sitting-room, she sang to try to charm away her melancholy.

She had her reward. The settled look of sadness relaxed, the drooping lips took a new expression, and a faint smile—a smile of pleasure—flitted across her mouth.

"I love that," she said gently. "Oh! I love that. It reminds me of something. What does it remind me of?"

She leaned her face against her hand and thought, but she found no answer. The habit of expressing herself was no longer there. All at once a curious gleam of intelligence seemed to come over her face. "Ah," she said, "I remember the name now. Crabbrook. A pretty place; trees and water and much pleasure. Before I committed a crime I lived there, and I was happy! Now... I am lost!" Her voice sank into the melancholy tone once more, and Marcia, her heart beating fast offered to sing once more.

But the maid and another attendant advised her to leave, because the poor lady was tired. As she bent and kissed her, her kiss was returned with almost passionate fervour, and then she said, clinging to Marcia's hand, "You will come again? You have done me good. When you sing I forget my crime."

"I will indeed come again, and soon," said Marcia, kindly.

She was intercepted by the doctor, who was waiting to thank her most earnestly. She stood talking to him for a little while. He was a gentleman of high standing in his profession, who had taken up the study of brain disease from sheer love of helping those so terribly afflicted. Marcia was longing to know—but shrank from asking—whether she was right in believing that she had been singing to Mrs. Beryl. As she was leaving, the gate, which opened from the shrubbery into the high road, swung back, and her question answered itself, for she recognized in the growing twilight the figure of Mr. Beryl, who overtook the doctor returning from escorting Marcia so far, and she heard him say something in an anxious voice about his wife. Fate, then, had brought her to the side of the poor girl who had had but a short spell of happiness.

The Duchess was half annoyed, half proud, of her friend's occupation, and Marcia had to use all her argumentative powers to enable her to see that she was receiving no harm and giving great pleasure.

"I am so horribly afraid of mad people," said her Grace.

"I used to be equally afraid," answered Marcia, and then she said no more.

The Duke gave Marcia right. "If you do not mind doing it, it is a great thing for them, poor things," he said, "but you must not fancy that all asylums are like Dr. Trevanion's. At best it is always a sad sight, but under his roof there is a look of home that softens the necessary restraint. By the way, I fancy one day you may see poor Beryl's wife there. What a pretty creature she was ! but flighty, odd, and then took a deeply religious, melancholy turn. Poor Beryl, what a sad, sad thing it has been for him !"

Then the Duchess saw Marcia's face.

"She has seen her," she said to herself, and immediately she changed the conversation.

But after this she made no further effort to keep Marcia from going there. She knew by that womanly intuition that enables one woman to understand the motives of another that it was a comfort and consolation to Marcia to do a kindness, to be of any use, however little, to Mr. Beryl's wife.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ATTITUDE OF THE COUNTY TOWARDS MRS. KINGSON.

TIME went on, and, but for the marked rudeness of Mrs. Adleybourne, Mrs. Burlington's mother had made her way with most people. The situation had changed a good deal. It was not so much a question of who intended to know her and be her friend, as whom she wished to see. Always retiring, and difficult of approach, the little lady found her cottage constantly besieged by visitors, some of whom did—and more did not—find her at home. Old friends from a distance came to see her, and, but for the incessant reminder Mrs. Adleybourne and Lady

Bridstone kept up, Maria felt as if all would, indeed, be well.

All but—there was one other but. Mrs. Kingson herself never forgot. Those who were very friendly she received, but she never returned a visit; she never went anywhere, except to her daughter's house, and there she never allowed anyone to be introduced to her.

Maria argued, blamed, coaxed her; all in vain. "No one shall ever have it in their power to say that they were obliged to know me. People are kind; be content with their kindness; the position I have taken up is the only one, darling; and it does not affect yours. I thank God daily for all the blessings I see you surrounded by. Be thankful with me, dearest!"

"But when I see" and then Maria stopped short. If her mother had not noticed the very rude way in which that child of Mrs. Adleybourne's had been called away from her mother's side as if her

nearness might contaminate him—if her mother had not noticed this, why tell her about it?”

Afterwards, Maria bitterly reproached herself for having been so unduly eager, so intensely anxious to hurry events; but all impetuous natures find waiting their hardest and most difficult task, and in those days to come she thought with keen remorse of her constant—her unspoken—but never-failing prayer; at any cost, anyhow, to see her mother righted, to see her honoured and appreciated as she deserved to be! The spring came as spring does not always come in “merry” England. The sun shone royally, and the east winds were disporting themselves elsewhere; and that favoured part of the country surrounding Burlington Manor was full of exquisite early wild flowers, and the woods round the manor were blue with wild hyacinths. Baby was supposed to know, to discriminate, and to appreciate each flower as it came out, and to be especially charmed with wild sorrel, wood anemones,

and other treasures, because the strong baby fists clutched them so firmly. The sagacity and precociousness of a first-born is always a remarkable feature in natural history. Every smile is supposed to have a deep meaning, every gurgle to be an effort at intellectual speech, every murmur to be expressive of some sentiment, as a rule understood only by the devoted mother or the doting nurse, and conveying nonsense to the less gifted parent of the masculine gender.

It was delightful to Mrs. Kingson as to Mr. Burlington to see Maria playing with her baby; unwearied in her efforts to win its laughter, and showing the loveliest side of her character in her unselfish forgetfulness of being either hot or tired.

Full of happiness, and full of life, her eyes sparkling with fun, her playful gestures full of unstudied grace, she made a lovely picture always.

Her husband thought so, especially one day when county business had detained him one afternoon,

and he joined them in a distant wood skirting the park wall—a wood famous for fir cones as for the great variety of the wild flowers. It was still and warm, and when baby had grown a little tired Maria sat down on some thick rugs borrowed from the pony carriage, and let her darling nestle down and sleep upon her lap.

Aunt Anne paced up and down with Mrs. Kingson. There was that touch of melancholy upon the spirits of Maria's mother which is not uncommon after unusual merriment; a shadow had come over the bright, speaking face, and to Miss Burlington's great surprise she spoke very unreservedly of her past and of the present.

Miss Burlington was surprised because she herself was reserved, but she was gratified by the full appreciation Mrs. Kingson showed for her son-in-law.

“He is so good. He is more than good, and he is the person above all others for my child! When I think of my own sufferings, at my own impatient folly, I feel now that I have nothing left to wish

for—as if I had been forgiven—since my past has not been visited upon her. That was my dread! You cannot, perhaps, understand me, but I feel so ready to go! Sometimes I long for the end!”

“You suffer so much?” asked Aunt Anne, full of ready sympathy.

“Yes; I suffer. I was afraid of leaving her before I prayed for life, at any cost to myself. Now, I should be so content, so glad, that all is well with her, and that I may go in peace!”

Aunt Anne had no words ready. Such calm, such a wonderful expression had come into Mrs. Kingson's face that she thought of a favourite passage of hers, where the expression of a human face is said to have the look of one who might have been talking with the angels. The conversation was interrupted by an appeal from Mr. Burlington, a distant landmark was in question, and Aunt Anne was asked whether he was not right in saying that it was the highest ground in Worcestershire.

She went to his side, and Mrs. Kingson used a slanting path going up the bank to where it touched and met the top of the wall, and stood looking along the road listening to the twittering birds busy with nesting cares, noting the flush of green upon the earlier trees, and the dappled sunlight on the road straying through the network of branches.

All at once the unmistakable sound of a runaway horse struck her. Then a pony came in sight galloping swiftly, aimlessly, and she saw dangling reins and a child, and heard it screaming.

Using the lowest portion of the wall where a coping-stone had been displaced, and, calling to the others, Mrs. Kingson leaped down, and as the pony passed her she caught the bridle and held on to it with a strength not her own. The child had been thrown just as she got up to it, and had been dragged mercifully only two or three yards.

Further on the road was newly metalled, and Mrs. Kingson shuddered as she took in the full import

of what might have been. The child was Mrs. Adleybourne's idolised son. Mrs. Adleybourne had barely strength to speak when she drove up. She sat on the roadside, her boy in her arms, tears pouring over her face, so completely unhinged, so terribly overcome, that Mr. Burlington put the whole party into the carriage, and sent them up to the house, Mrs. Kingson, silent, still, as ever, holding herself under complete control, and passively allowing Mrs. Adleybourne to shower kisses upon her hands and to hug her child alternately. When they reached the house Mrs. Burlington was already there, and Mr. Burlington lifted Mrs. Kingson in his arms, and, much to his wife's surprise, carried her straight up to his wife's sitting-room and gave two orders at once. Her maid was to be brought at once with the usual restoratives, and the doctor was sent for.

"Is my mother ill?" asked Maria, rushing upstairs breathlessly.

"You must try to be calm for her sake, dear. No one can do what she did with impunity."

"And for that woman!" she murmured.

"Oh, do you know her so little?" he said, his eyes full of light and moistened with emotion. "For that very reason she will all the more rejoice."

Maria, full of vague fears, went to her mother. Her fears vanished as she looked at her. Her face was so sweet, so calm. She was apparently sleeping.

When her maid came she roused herself, and spoke, asking for Cyril. "I want to thank him," she said, softly; "and I want..."

Her maid and the doctor knew what she wanted: and in a short time the old priest who had been her fast friend came to her. The night passed so swiftly that Maria was startled by the dawn. When the sunrays came in Mrs. Kingson opened her eyes; once more she murmured, "Thank you," as she pressed Cyril Burlington's hand, and then she asked Maria to kiss her. "I am weary," she said, "and

am going to sleep." Those were her last words. She died as she had lived, acting up to her sense of duty. She had made great mistakes, but she had suffered much; and when Maria heard the way in which her mother was spoken of she felt as we sometimes do when we have impatiently longed for the realisation of a wish, that it comes when its value is overshadowed by the manner of its coming. Never was a single word uttered against the memory of the brave woman who had risked and lost her life in saving the child of a woman who had stood aloof and done her what harm she could. The lesson so terribly given was not lost on Mrs. Adleybourne.

CHAPTER XIX.

OVER THE FLOWER-BEDS.

MR. BERYL, in his periodical visits to his unfortunate wife, was always puzzled by her repeated statements of the angel that she maintained came and sang to her. It was a blessed change of thought. At first he had taken little notice, thinking it merely one of the hallucinations which took various forms. But her persistence made him feel that there was something more in her reiteration than usual, and he asked the attendant whether any lady went to see her.

“A lady comes to see all the patients very often,”

she answered. "The doctor has never mentioned her name, but she has a remarkable voice, and when she sings they are all quieter. I don't know quite how to explain it, but it has a particular sound; I am myself always struck by it."

"How was it she came here?"

"I really cannot tell you, sir. The doctor heard her sing somewhere, and he asked her to come here."

"I wonder where he met her?"

"I have no idea, sir; I never heard him say; but I know that there is something soft in her voice that quiets the patients."

Mr. Beryl asked no more; but when he next saw the doctor he began to talk about it, and asked the name of the lady who exercised such a mysterious influence, expressing at the same time his gratitude to her. His wife seemed so much better, he thought.

The doctor looked at him curiously. "We do

not think Mrs. Beryl so well lately," he answered.

"No! She seems so much less excitable."

"She has less strength to show it."

Mr. Beryl was silent. How many years this terrible position has lasted! Was life a desirable boon for her? For though lately so quiet, so gentle, there were terrible moments and terrible scenes to look back upon. When driven to despair the monotonous cry of "Lost" had been a relief after the anguish and acute alternative fits of madness that rendered restraint necessary.

"Is there anything in the world, doctor, I can do? Is there anything I have left undone?"

"There is nothing. There is this improvement, if we dare call it an improvement. Your wife is happier; she shows less signs of melancholy; but she confuses people. She used to think herself in Paradise, and talking to the angels. There has been a great influence for good in the visitor she has had."

He was so evidently resolved not to name that visitor that Mr. Beryl could not ask him farther. It so happened, however, that the very next time he went to the asylum he had to go earlier than usual, and he was shown into the doctor's sitting-room, which was in communication with the rooms devoted to the two or three ladies who were under his care. Then he heard the voice, and recognized it only too well. It was the voice of Marcia Dorington. It was like her to come and help these unhappy people! Did she guess—did she know who that poor fragile girl was, with the sad eyes and the perpetual despair?

The voice in all its exquisite sweetness came floating towards him. He was quite amazed, and without waiting to see the doctor—afraid of meeting Marcia, whom he had not seen for so long—he slipped away, and breathed more freely when he got out into an unfrequented lane, where his pained memory, all the anguish of his position, struck him

afresh; and the battle he had fought in olden times had to be fought over again. How long it was since he had seen Marcia? Was it months or years?

He went to London, and busied himself in all the occupations in which a man with the gift of writing cleverly spends his time. And the reports from the asylum followed him there. His departure was a great relief to the Duchess, who was one of those people who, having an affectionate heart and no particular sorrows or anxieties of her own, was very apt to make herself miserable about those of her friends.

"Marcia is really very tiresome," she said to the Duke one day.

"Is she?"

"Now, do sympathize a little with me. 'Is she,' is not sympathizing at all."

"Is it not? What do you want? a contradiction or an echo; if I said, 'She is very tiresome,' what a rage some one would be in."

"I should think so!" said the Duchess with much spirit.

"Here is that poor unhappy man writing again. My dear, he is very much in love!"

"They all seem to be very much in love," said the Duke placidly. "That is the worst of having an attractive young lady with you."

"I am sure dear Marcia does not try to attract anyone."

"That is exactly one of her greatest merits."

"I am very sorry for the man. Are you not a little sorry for him also?"

"My dear child, you have not named him. In the abstract, I am sorry for all men; but to sympathize with an individual man one must have some vague idea who he is."

"Sir Charles Oakley."

"Sir Charles, dull, elderly, prosaic, and with a wig. My dear, I am not sorry for him at all. He is very presumptuous. Commend me to female friendship

if you think that man good enough for Marcia!"

"But I do not! Of course not! I never dreamt of her marrying him; but I am sorry for him, because I think he is desperately in love."

"He is desperately in love with himself."

"Then why does he persist in wanting to marry Marcia?"

"Because as I have heard him say he has the best house, the best cook, the best horses in London; and he wants the best wife."

"Then I am glad he cannot have her. All the same, I wish dear Marcia had a home of her own, and definite things to do. I do so dislike the way she goes to that asylum."

"I suppose some one has been ill-natured."

"Yes; someone has been ill-natured; not Mrs. Adley-bourne. Ever since poor Mrs. Kingson's death she has never said a single ill-natured thing of anyone."

"Then I know who it is—Lady Rhodes."

The Duchess nodded.

"Things said to me I can answer; but no one ever says these things to me. I do not know why." The Duke thought he did know.

"How pleasant it is to see Mrs. Burlington now. She is always the same, so bright and so original," said the Duchess presently.

"Yes. She has a bright way of saying the very commonest things. It does one good to see Burlington's happiness. He went through a good deal."

"And the question is whether, if they had not gone through a good deal, they would ever have discovered how much they cared for each other. I think eventually it must always come out."

"If it is there," said the Duke, laughing at her.

"Now the election is coming on, I wonder if Mrs. Burlington will become aggressively political or not."

"I am quite certain that she will be aggressive in nothing," said the Duchess firmly; by which it may be seen that the two ladies had foregathered

since the first acquaintance had been made, and had indeed become friends.

The election soon turned the county into the usual state of feverish excitement. People bowed gravely where one week before they had cordially shaken hands, and the usual stories floated about concerning election speeches with the customary bitterness. It is always a matter for regret that on these occasions so much of that bitterness can be traced to the women of the various families. Why the partisanship should engender so much of this feeling is always an unsolved problem, and a problem never likely to be solved.

Wives not perhaps noted for conjugal affection at other times now quote their husbands, or, perhaps, misquote them; fancied slights are exaggerated into matters of real offence, and nothing, perhaps, shows human nature so completely at its worst than a county election.

Mr. Burlington had sincere convictions and the

support of the larger part of the country gentlemen; but he was quite able to believe that his opponents were equally sincere.

"How can a man act contrary to his convictions," he said, laughing one day. "Do let us give our opponents credit for this much honesty!"

"Oh, those fellows haven't it in them to be honest" was the answer, and this was the feeling of many.

It was while things were at fever heat that Mrs. Adleybourne went to Burlington Manor at an unusual time (before luncheon), and sent an apology and an entreaty that Mrs. Burlington would see her.

Maria was in the flower garden, superintending the laying-out of some new beds, and she immediately joined her visitor.

"I hope nothing is wrong," she said, as she saw the disturbed countenance of the ponderous lady before her.

"Everything is wrong," said Mrs. Adleybourne very solemnly, and she sighed deeply.

Maria was concerned. She pulled off her gardening gloves, and sat down prepared to listen and sympathize.

"I need not tell you, Mrs. Burlington, that I have done my very best, I have done my utmost, to help your husband."

"You are very good."

"No! it is only a small thing. I have written to all my tradesmen; I have hunted up everyone I could think of. And I made sure of one person; I made certain of Sir Harvey Bridstone. My dear Mrs. Burlington, if his wife would only leave him alone! But she won't; and all I say, all I plead, does not effect her in the least. She answers always in the same way. Sir Harvey must vote for the Opposition. It is quite abominable of her!"

"But if he thinks it right?"

"But that is exactly what he does not do; he owns as much! Lady Bridstone wrote a pamphlet, and put her views forward. Well, because she has

done this, she says Sir Harvey is bound to back her up. So the poor man is to have no views of his own. I was so furious with her that I gave her my mind very freely."

"Dear Mrs. Adleybourne, pray do not distress yourself. I shall be very glad if my husband wins, but I sometimes think no victory is worth all the ill will and disputes that it engenders. I remember when I first married I made Lady Bridstone very angry because I said frankly, I had no political convictions. I am afraid my convictions simply consist in thinking everything right my husband approves of. I have neither read much nor thought much about politics, and it is inconceivable to me that differences of opinion which must always exist should cause so much ill feeling. Will it ever die away; shall we ever all be friends again?"

"My dear," said Mrs. Adleybourne. "I never wish to be friends again with people who have such wrong ideas; an election is the test; the test.

No; we are not made alike, but when people deliberately, with their eyes open, choose to see their country going to the dogs and trusting our cherished institutions to the hands of a set of Radical nobodies —— ”

Then Mrs. Burlington saw that arguments were thrown away.

“Let us leave politics to men who understand them,” she said, rising, and speaking in her most winning way, “and let me show you my new flower-beds. No one understands the massing of colours together as well as you do.”

It was no insincere compliment. Mrs. Adleybourne stayed on to luncheon, and when she finally drove away she left a good deal of her bitterness in those flower-beds, and left more charmed than ever with the fascinating mistress of Burlington Manor.

CHAPTER XX.

VICTORY.

THE election was over. Mr. Burlington had a large majority, and was perhaps more surprised at this than anyone else. April was over. It had wept itself out and May (not the May of the sad, sunless type) had set in. An ideal, poetic, sunshiny month that rejoiced every one, brought out those myriads of insects the birds rejoice in, and called forth the rich, mellow songs from the thrushes and blackbirds we hear with a never-ending content.

In the very middle of the election when everyone's attention had been fixed upon that great event, a

hasty summons had brought two people who had not met for long years into the presence of Mrs. Beryl—her husband and Marcia Dorington.

Mrs. Beryl was dying, and for a day or two before her death her clouded intellect had cleared, as it so often does at the last.

She did not quite know where she was, and she was surprised that her husband was not there. Her mind went back to her last conscious time at home in a manner inexpressibly affecting to those two, who knew how the intervening years had been passed.

She took up the thread as if it had never been broken, receiving her husband kindly when he arrived as if they had only just parted, and wondering what brought Marcia there.

“The lady who sings to you,” said the doctor.

Mrs. Beryl made no answer. She looked puzzled, and, passing her hand over her head, she said, “I have been ill, and I feel weak.”

Her husband could not speak. He knelt down beside her, and held her hand.

"Shall I go, or shall I stay?" asked Marcia, most anxious not to be in the way.

"Pray stay," said the doctor, earnestly.

All at once Mrs. Beryl said, "It is so sad. Now I am well the voice has stopped, and I loved it. I wish, I wish, I could hear it again!"

Mr. Beryl for the first time looked imploringly at Marcia.

Nothing had ever cost poor Marcia so much. She covered her face for a moment and then began to sing in a low and nervous manner, but by degrees the effort brought its own courage as reward, and her voice, soft, clear, penetrating, filled the room.

"You hear," said Mrs. Beryl softly to her husband. Then memory rushed back to her, and she said, "Now I know, now I understand." She drew her hand away from her husband's and joined the two hands together.

She closed her eyes, and then opening them suddenly, said: "It has been hard for you, and you will be lonely. I will ask my angel to stay and sing to you also! She drew Marcia's hand towards her face and pressed her cheek upon it. Then slowly she put it into her husband's. Be good to him," she said; "you have been very good to me!" She again closed her eyes, and Marcia left the room and the house and went home.

Afterwards the doctor told her that she had asked him to leave her alone with her husband, and in the early morning she died, very calmly and very peacefully.

Mr. Beryl sent her a few books and a ring, which he said his wife wished her to have, and added that he was going to travel. Might he write to her sometimes, and would she answer his letters?

To his request Marcia could give but one answer. She went to London, but she did not go out, save to a few intimate friends. The scenes she had

lately witnessed had saddened her too much.

Maria found herself in a pretty house in London, as she had once dreamt of being. She was considered very brilliant, very fascinating, but she made no effort to shine, which was probably why her merits were so widely recognized.

Lady Rhodes was never able to resist planting a sting if she could, but she never succeeded in making her unhappy. Indeed, where happiness depends upon home, and not outside influences, it is difficult to touch it, however keenly an outsider may wish to do so.

Perhaps next to Mrs. Burlington the person Lady Rhodes objected to most was the kind-hearted Duchess of these pages. Her Grace one day made a speech—most innocently—that Lady Rhodes never forgave her for. “It is so nice of me and it is so nice of you, Lady Rhodes, to be so fond of Mrs. Burlington, because, whenever she is present, we are quite extinguished! She is so much more

brilliant than we are." Words failed Lady Rhodes on that occasion, but she never forgave it. Aunt Anne often looked back to that expression of Cyril's which had so disturbed her. She was almost more than anyone the great champion of all Maria thought—of all she did.

There is little left to say about the brilliant woman of this story. That she was one of those whose individuality sets a mark on all she touches is true; but when this power—and it is a power—is used to enhance the happiness of her children, of her husband, and her home, who can take exception to it?

Mrs. Burlington would always be a centre of attraction. She had the knack of investing everyday things with a charm that made them far removed from common-place; and, though she never would allow him to say it to her, her husband was convinced that the extraordinary success that followed his career was entirely due to his brilliant wife.

THE END.

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